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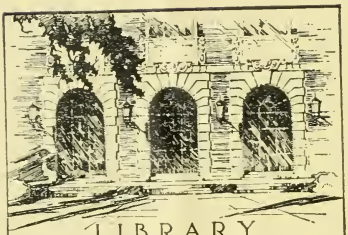

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TARA

A MAHRATTA TALE

BY

CAPTAIN MEADOWS TAYLOR, M.R.I.A.

AUTHOR OF 'CONFESSIONS OF A THUG,' ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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TO

HIS EXCELLENCY

THE EARL OF CARLISLE, K.G.

VICEROY OF IRELAND,

ETC. ETC. ETC.

My Lord,

The scenes and characters which I have endeavoured to depict in these volumes will be necessarily new and strange to you; but if they excite interest in the native annals of a country of which I find but little real knowledge existing, the object of the work will have been attained; while, by the kind courtesy which permits me to dedicate it to you, your Excellency confers upon me a very sincere gratification.

I have the honour to be,

Your Lordship's very faithful servant,

MEADOWS TAYLOR.

Old Court,
Harold's Cross, near Dublin,
August 1863.

PROLOGUE.

In the year 1839, I became acquainted with the late Professor Wilson; and in course of conversation on the possibility of illustrating events in Indian history by works of fiction, the details of the present story, among other subjects, were slightly sketched out by me. He was interested in them, and suggested my writing the tale for 'Blackwood's Magazine.' I could not, however, then commence it, and deferred doing so till my return to India; but, falling into political and civil employment there, was never able to continue what I had begun, till my return home.

The history of the period of this tale, A.D. 1657, will be found at length in Scott's 'Ferishta,' and vol. i. of Grant Duff's 'History of the Mahrattas;' and to these works I beg to refer such of my readers as may be curious in regard to its particulars, of which a slight sketch may not, perhaps, be altogether out of place.

In A.D. 1347, a great portion of the Dekhan was consolidated into a kingdom by Sultan Alla-oo-deen who founded the Bahmuni dynasty. It was divided into three great provinces, Dowlatabad, Beejapoor, and Golconda, which, on the decay of the royal house, became separate kingdoms under their several viceroys, who successively declared their independence. Of these, Beejapoor was the largest, and became by far, the most important and powerful. Yoosuf Adil Shah, a Turk of European descent, believed, indeed, to have been the son of a Sultan of Constantinople, threw off his allegiance to the Bahmuni dynasty in A.D. 1849, and established himself at Beejapoor, which afterwards rose to be the greatest, as it was the most magnificent, city of the Dekhan.

The prosperity of the Dekhan kingdoms excited the jealousy of the Mogul Emperors of Dehli, and their subjugation was projected by the Emperor Akbur; but it had made little progress at his death in A.D. 1605. In the reign of his grandson Shah Jehán, the State of Ahmednugger, or Dowlatabad, was finally subdued about 1630, and the Mogul power so far established in the Dekhan. His son, Aurungzeeb, pursued the reduction of the two remaining kingdoms, Beejapoor and Golconda, with varying success, but untiring pertinacity; and, before his death

in 1707, they had succumbed to him. Beejapoor fell on the 15th October 1686; Golconda in September 1687.

Amidst the struggles of the Mahomedans, the predatory power of the Mahratta people arose under Sivaji, and assumed a more definite form than it had ever before possessed; and, as the author of the Mahratta History observes, "stirred those latent embers "till, like the parched grass kindled amidst the "forests of the Syhadree mountains, they burst forth "in spreading flame, and men afar wondered at the "conflagration."

Of the many remarkable and romantic events connected with the rise of the Mahratta power, those which form the subject of the present Tale are, of all, the most cherished by the people; and they are recited, or sung in ballads, with an interest which time does not diminish, and which has exalted the national hero Sivaji Rajah, to the distinction almost, of a demigod.

At the period of the tale, 1657, though the political foundations of Beejapoor were shaking, nothing had affected its material prosperity; and the palaces, mosques, mausoleums, and other public buildings of the capital, were in their greatest magnificence. The city itself, except its vast fortifications, which are still perfect, has now, for the most part, disappeared: and

long lines of shapeless mounds, covering an immense area, mark where its streets existed. In some quarters there are villages, widely separated, which once formed part of the general masses of habitations; and there are everywhere remains of mosques, tombs, and palaces, which convey a true estimate of the wealth of those for whom they were constructed, and the taste and skill of the architects.

The citadel is still perfect as to walls, towers, and ditch, and is a very complete and picturesque specimen of Puthan fortification. The royal palaces situated in it, are, however, roofless, much ruined, and advancing to destruction; and the gardens and terraces, with their fountains, are covered by brushwood and tangled creepers. It is a happy thing, however, that the liberality of the Indian Government has arrested decay wherever practicable, and that all the most beautiful buildings have been restored, while repairs continue to be made as needful.

The buildings so restored are—

The Mausoleum of Ibrahim Adil Shah, called the Ibrahim Roza;
The Mausoleum of Mahmood Adil Shah;
The Méhturi Mahal;
The Jumma Mosque;
The Assar Shureef;
The Royal Well, with its cloisters; and some others.

Of the above, the Assar Shureef is one of the ancient royal palaces, which contains some sacred relics; and, being in the actual condition in which it was left, is perhaps the most interesting of all.

By orders of Government also, drawings from actual measurement, were made a few years ago by a clever civil engineer and architect, of all the principal buildings. These are now in the India Library in London; and, to any one curious on the subject, will give a far better idea of the superb Saracenic architecture of the Adil Shahy dynasty, than any description. Mahomedan architecture in India is always beautiful; but there is a combination of grandeur and grace about that of Beejapoor which is not approached elsewhere, and a beauty of ornament and execution nowhere exceeded. The Jumma Mosque, with its side aisles, was constructed for the accommodation of eight thousand persons at prayer; and the superb dome of the Mausoleum of Sultan Mahmood Adil Shah, built of hewn stone, is the largest in its outward diameter in the world.

With these noble remains, the country around them, and its population of all classes, I have been familiar for many years past; and such descriptions of scenery and character as may be found in these volumes, are the result of personal knowledge. The actors in my story are Hindus and Mahomedans;

but the same passions and affections exist among them as among ourselves, and thus the motives and deeds of my characters may, at least, be intelligible. I can only hope they may prove of interest.

It was very strange, twenty-five years ago, to observe the remarkable interval of exactly one hundred years, between the attack of Sivaji on the Beejapoor Mahomedans in 1657, and the victory of Lord Clive over those of Bengal at Plassey in 1757. Both results led directly to the establishment of powers widely differing in their aims and characters, but not the less irresistible by the Mahomedans; and the victory at Pertabgurh, was as directly conducive to the establishment and extension of the Mahratta authority, and the decadence of the Mahomedan, as that of Plassey has been to our own sovereignty, and to the political extinction of both. But this curious accordance of dates becomes still more interesting, when we observe that, on the anniversary of a third century, June 1857, the heads of Mahomedan and Mahratta power were leagued against that which had subdued both; and know that their combined efforts however desperate, and their intrigues however virulent, proved alike futile.

TARA:

A MAHRATTA TALE.

CHAPTER I.

"TARA, O Tara! where art thou?"

"Mother, I am here. Is it time?"

"Yes; we should go with the offerings to the temple. Come, thy father hath long been gone, and it will be broad day ere we can reach it. Come," said her mother, entering a small open verandah which skirted the inner court of the house, where the girl sat reading by the light of a lamp, now paling before the dawn which was fast spreading over the sky.

She shut her book with a reverential gesture, laid it aside in its quilted cover, and stood up. How beautiful she was! Let us describe this Bramhun girl to you, O reader! if we can, and tell you a little concerning her.

There were many fair women of her sect in Tooljapoor, and they are always the most remarkable of their countrywomen, but none so fair as Tara the daughter of Vyas Shastree.* From her earliest childhood she had given promise of grace and beauty, and since that period—from the time when, hanging shyly to the skirt of her mother's garment, she passed daily through the crowded bazaar and street which led to the upper gate of the temple—to the present, she had ever been an object of remark and admiration; while the rank and learning of her father, and his position as chief priest, had maintained for her a continued and increasing interest as she grew up. None who had the privilege of addressing her ever omitted a loving greeting or respectful salutation: the public flower-sellers intrusted her with their choicest garlands or nosegays to offer up at the shrine—the confectioners had ever a delicate sweetmeat with which to tempt the child—and even the rudest peasant or soldier looked at her, as she passed him, in wonder, stretched out his hands to her, and kissed the tips of his fingers in a worshipful salutation and benediction.

The promise of the child was more than fulfilled in the girl now budding into early womanhood; and her appearance was so remarkable that, while many of her old friends in the bazaar now rarely ventured to accost her, and even turned aside their heads reverently as she passed, she could not traverse the

* *Shastree*—title of one learned in the Shastràs.

crowded street which led from her house to the temple, or, indeed, move anywhere during the day, without attracting admiration from the crowds of strangers who, from all parts of India, visited that renowned shrine of which her father was the chief priest and manager. Many a pilgrim and worshipper gazed wonderingly upon the calm, gentle face which met him at the earliest dawn in its devotional perambulation round the temple, or followed with his eye the graceful figure which, carrying the daily sacrificial offerings, descended the flights of steps by which the shrine was approached; and, far away in his native village, under the snows of Himalaya, the burning sands of Raméshwur, or the green plains of Bengal, told of the beautiful vision, and never forgot it.

Tara has been up since before the false dawn. She has assisted her father with water to bathe, and in his private worship of the household gods. She has bathed herself, and is now dressed in the simple saree, or robe of all Hindu females. It is of dark-blue silk, striped with a fainter blue, and has a broad border of a light but rich pattern harmonising with the colours of the garment which, consisting of one long piece only, is wound round her several times to form a skirt, then passed about her body and over her head on the left side, whence the end, which is of rich gold tissue interwoven with crimson flowers and green leaves, hangs heavily over her shoulder and back. Below the garment, is a closely-fitting bodice of striped orange silk only; but no portion of

it is visible except a little of the sleeve above the elbow. Tara is holding the border of her dress close to her cheek, as if to conceal it even from her mother; and the graceful outline of her arm may be followed, from the tips of the taper fingers past the wrist partly covered with purple bangles and a massive gold ring, along the soft round arm to the dimpled elbow, whence it is lost among the folds of the saree which falls over it.

Do you expect that her complexion will be fair like that of our own northern girls? Ah, no! that would not harmonise with the dress or the country; and yet it is very fair. Not a deep rich olive, but what seems at a first glance pale and colourless; yet the skin is so glossy and transparent that the warm glow of her blood is suffused under it with the least passing emotion or excitement, which, as it fades, leaves, as you think, a more beautiful tint behind.

And the features harmonised with the colour. To a casual observer their expression was almost one of habitual sadness, yet it was not so in reality: there was calm, which as yet had known no rude ruffling —a sweetness that was index to a simple, loving, trustful mind. True, she had cares beyond those of ordinary household occurrences, and these had no doubt increased the pensive expression always remarkable. So her countenance was not easy to describe: nor could you account very well for the patient, care-enduring look which met you from one so young. What every one saw first, were the soft

brown eyes, shaded with long eyelashes which rested upon the cheek. Ordinarily perhaps, or if seen when cast down, these eyes appeared nowise remarkable; yet if passing emotions were noticed, they closed when she was merry, till only a bright spark of light remained glistening through the long lashes; and again, if surprise, wonder, or admiration were excited, they suddenly expanded, so that one looked into a depth of clear glowing colour, violet and brown, the expression of which could not be fathomed. But habitually they were modest, pensive, and gentle—full of intelligence, and seemed to correspond with a low musical cadence of voice perfectly natural, yet assisted, perhaps, by the habit of reading and studying aloud, which she had learned from her father. In those calm eyes there was as yet no passion of any kind. Some suffering, perhaps, but no rough awakening to the reality of life.

The rest of her face left nothing to be desired. The Bramhuns of Western India usually possess features more European in their character than those of the same sect in other parts of the country, and in this respect the women share them with the men, if they do not, indeed, exceed them. So Tara had a soft oval face, with small full lips and mouth, a thin straight nose with nostrils almost transparent, which seemed to obey the passing emotions of her countenance. Though the features were soft, they were neither insipid nor weak in character; on the contrary, they appeared full of a woman's best strength—endurance

and patience; while, in the full glossy chin and throat, enough of determination was expressed to show firmness and consistency of no common order. Except the eyes, perhaps, there was no feature of the face which could be called exactly beautiful, yet the whole combined to create an expression which was irresistibly interesting and charming; and where all harmonised, separate portions were not remarked.

Every movement of her lithe form was displayed by the soft silk drapery which fell over it in those graceful folds which we see expressed in ancient statues, and it was cast in those full yet delicately-rounded proportions which sculptors have best loved to imitate. Standing as she was, the girl had fallen into an attitude which was most expressive: her head raised and turned to meet her mother's entrance: a delicate naked foot, with a chain anklet of gold resting on it, put out from beneath her robe: her eyes open, yet not to their full width: and her lips apart, disclosing the even glistening teeth:—she appeared, in her arrested movement, as if she waited some further communication from her mother, or had herself one to make before she stirred.

No wonder that, as each morning she left the house with her mother to pay her devotions at the temple, and passed along with downcast eyes, her graceful figure attracted increased attention day by day. Many a good wish followed her — many a benediction from the aged poor of the town, to whom her charities were liberally dispensed; and it

might be, too, that other admiration, less pure in its character, also rested upon her, and often, unknown to her, dogged her steps.

The contrast between Tara and her mother was in most respects a striking one. No one could deny that Anunda Bye was a handsome woman; her neighbours and gossips told her so, and she quite believed it. She looked, too, very young of her age; and as she sailed down or up the street leading to the temple, and received the humble salutations of shopkeepers, flower-sellers, and all the tradesmen of that busy quarter, with an air which plainly showed how much she considered it due to her rank and station—it would have been difficult to say whether the timid girl following her, and screening her face from the gaze of the people as she moved along, was her daughter or younger sister. Either she might be, and it seemed more probable the latter, than the former.

Taller than her daughter as yet, Anunda Bye* was not without much of the same grace of figure; but it was cast on a bolder scale. The features were more decided and prominent, the colour several shades darker. The face, handsome as it was, had little of the softening element of intellectuality in it; and Anunda was ignorant of everything but household management, in which she excelled, in all departments, to a degree that made her the envy of her female acquaintance, and her husband the envied of

* *Bye*—"lady;" a title of respect accorded to all Mahratta women of rank.

his male associates whose domestic affairs were not conducted with the same regularity, and whose cookery was not so good.

Enter the Shastree's house at any time, and you were at once struck with its great neatness. The floor was always plastered with liquid clay by the women-servants when he was absent at the temple for morning worship, and retained a cool freshness while it dried, and, indeed, during the day. It was generally decorated by pretty designs in white and red chalk powder dropped between the finger and thumb, in the execution of which both mother and daughter were very expert and accomplished. The Shastree's seat, which was, in fact, a small raised dais at one side of the large room, was usually decked with flowers, while, upon the floor before it, the greatest artistic skill was expended in ornament by Tara and her mother. Above it were pictures of favourite divinities, painted in distemper colour: the amorous blue-throated Krishna playing to the damsels of Muttra; the solemn four-armed Ganésha, sitting with a grave elephant's head on his shoulders; the beautiful Lakshmee and Suruswutti, the goddesses of wealth and learning, the objects of household adoration: and the terrible six-armed Bhowani in her contest with the demon Mahéshwur, in commemoration of which the temple had been erected—all surrounded by wreaths of flowers interwoven with delicate border patterns;—had been partly executed by the Shastree himself, and partly by Tara, who followed

his tastes and accomplishments after a pretty fashion. Thus decorated, the dais had a cheerful effect in the room: and choice and intimate friends only, were admitted to the privilege of sitting upon it.

The house itself was perhaps in no degree remarkable. Outside, facing the street, was a high wall, with a large door within a projecting porch or archway, which had a seat on either hand as you entered. The door-frame was richly carved, and on each side a horse's head projected from the upper corner. Above the door, in a space left for the purpose, was written in red Sanscrit letters, "Sree Martund Prussunn," "The holy Martund protects;" and Martund was one of the appellations of Siva. This legend was surrounded by wreaths of flowers in the same colour; and across the whole was a garland of mango leaves now withered, which had hung there since the last festival.

As you entered the court, the principal room was before you, on the basement of the house, which you ascended by three steps. It was a wide open verandah, extending the width of the court, supported upon seven wooden pillars, also richly carved, on which crossed square capitals were fixed, and from these, beams were laid to form the roof. This verandah was double; the inner portion being raised a step above the other to form a dais, and at each end of the inner portion were two small rooms in the corners, one of which was the Shastree's library. The whole of these verandahs could be shut in

closely by heavy curtains of quilted cotton, neatly ornamented by devices of birds and flowers, which hung between the pillars; but usually all was open, or closed only by transparent blinds of split cane suspended outside.

Having a northern aspect, this room was always cool, and was the ordinary resort of the Shastree. Here he received his friends and neighbours, held disputations, and instructed his pupils. The women seldom entered it except in the evenings when undisturbed; for, though unsecluded from men, a certain degree of reserve and retirement is always observable in the women of Hindu families. There was no ornament about the main apartment except the Shastree's dais, and the borders painted about the niches and architraves of the doors; but it was kept a pure white, and was scrupulously clean.

In the centre of the back wall of the inner verandah was a door which opened into a second court, round which was a verandah also open, and, leading from it on three sides, sleeping chambers and a bathroom. In this verandah there was nothing but a few spinning-wheels and their low stools; for Anunda Bye had no idea of allowing women-servants to be idle, and when they were not working otherwise, they were spinning cotton yarn for their own clothes. Anunda herself had her wheel, and Tara hers, and sometimes they spun yarn fine enough for the Shastree's waistcloths.

On the fourth side of the court was the kitchen,

and, passing by it, a door led into a third court, more private, though not so large as the second. In the centre of it was an altar painted in distemper, on which grew a bush of toolsee or sweet basil, grateful to the gods; and in the verandah, another altar, similar in form, on which burned the sacred fire never extinguished. Close to it was the door of the private temple of the house, which contained the household gods of the family. Here it was that Tara best loved to sit when her share of domestic affairs was completed. Here she tended the sacred fire, and offered worship, such as a woman could perform, in the temple. She had a small garden in one corner of the court, which contained a few jessamine bushes, marigolds, and other common flowers, which she cultivated for offerings to the household gods in the daily worship. Here she could study undisturbed, and did so with all her heart—here, too, it was that her mother found her.

There was no decoration about the house, except, as we have already mentioned, border patterns and quaintly designed birds and flowers upon the walls. Furniture such as we need was unknown. A small cotton or woollen carpet laid down here and there, with a heavy cotton pillow covered with white calico, sufficed for sitting or reclining; and as the goddess Bhowani, in her incarnation at Tooljapoor, does not choose, as is believed, that any one in the town should lie upon a bed except herself, a cotton mattress on the floor, or a cool mat, sufficed for sleeping.

The house, therefore, would have appeared bare in any of my reader's eyes; but it was neat and pleasant to look at: and one can imagine, though decorated in a higher style of art, the Roman houses at Pompeii to have been similar in most respects of plan and domestic arrangement.

There was no evidence of wealth, yet the Shastree was a prosperous man; and could you have seen Anunda Bye's stores of copper and brass utensils —large vessels for boiling vast quantities of rice on festivals and household ceremonies—her brass lamps and candelabra, her silver plates for eating from, and silver drinking vessels;—could you have seen the contents of her private room, in which were sundry large chests, full of sarees, or women's garments, of great value; some heir-looms, woven with gold and silver thread, each having its peculiar history; the shawls which belonged to her husband, the gifts of princes and nobles, tributes to his learning, of which she was very proud;—could you have seen, too, the strong box that lay hidden among the clothes in the largest chest, full of family jewels and ornaments, among which were two necklaces of fine pearls, massive gold ornaments for ankles and wrists, for neck and ears;—could you have seen all these, and the heavy gold cinctures round Anunda's and Tara's trim waists, and their massive gold bracelets and anklets,—you would have been envious, my dear reader, of considerable wealth in this particular.

Otherwise, indeed, the Shastree was a man of substance. Being an only son, with no other sharers, at his father's death, he had inherited a considerable property. He had himself earned, by his scholarly abilities, a small estate in a neighbouring province, the rent of which was punctually paid, and was improving, for he was a good landlord. He derived a handsome income from the Temple service, and from the offerings made to him as head of the establishment. He farmed some land, too, near the town, on the bank of the small river Boree, and had an excellent garden near the village of Sindphul, in the plain below the hills, the daily supply of vegetables from which was very profitable from the large and constant consumption in the town. Finally, as one of the most learned Sanscrit scholars of the Dekhan, his instruction was held in deserved repute, and his classes were attended by young Bramhuns from all parts of the country, from whom he received fees according to their means.

CHAPTER II.

In many respects Vyas Shastree was a remarkable man, and, very deservedly, he was held in great respect throughout the country. No one could look on him without being conscious of his extreme good breeding and intellectuality. Well made, there was no appearance of great strength, though in the town gymnasium, as a youth, he had held his own among the wrestlers, and had even been famous as a sword-player. Those were troubled times, when a knowledge of weapons was needed by all men, and even peaceful merchants and priests did not neglect the use of them; but, as he grew older, the Shastree had laid aside these exercises, and spare, strong, muscular arms were perhaps the only evidence of them that remained. Certainly the head and face were fine. The forehead was high and broad, slightly wrinkled now, and furrowed by parallel lines. The head was shaved, except the lock behind, and its intellectual organs were prominent. The eyebrows, strongly marked, but not bushy, projected boldly over expressive eyes of a deep steel grey, which were very

bright and clear, and a prominent nose of Roman character, which corresponded with a well-shaped mouth and chin. Certainly it was a handsome face—pale, sallow perhaps in colour, yet healthy, and which occasionally assumed a noble and even haughty expression; but, ordinarily, it was good-humoured: and evidently elevated and purified in character by intellectual pursuits.

The Shastree was a man of note, as we have said, as to learning and accomplishments. He was a profound Sanscrit scholar; and in law, grammar, and logic, with the deep metaphysics of the Vedas, and their commentators, he had few superiors. With mathematics and astronomy to calculate eclipses and positions of planets, he had sufficient acquaintance to assist an old friend, who was infirm, in the arrangement of the 'Tooljapoor Almanac,' a task by no means easy, as it included calculation of the eclipses of the year, and astrological tables. Of the popular Poorans he had less knowledge, or perhaps did not believe them; and, as many do now in these later days, held more to the ancient Vedantic theism than to the modern idolatry of the Pooranic worship. The Shastree, as a devout Bramhun, had made pilgrimages, being accompanied by his wife; and in disputations at Benares, Nuddea in Bengal, and Gya—as well as at Madura and Conjevaram, in the south of India—had gained credit, if not renown.

In lighter accomplishments too, such as music, he had a fair amount of knowledge, and sang sweetly

the various Rāgs, Droopuds, and other measures of the classic styles. He considered, perhaps, ordinary songs below notice; yet when he relaxed, and was prevailed upon to sing some of the plaintive ballads of his own Mahratta country, to his own Vina* accompaniment, or any of his own compositions, the effect was very charming. Tara had been carefully taught by him, and the neighbours often listened to her sweet voice in the morning and evening hymns, and chants of the service, in the little temple of the house. Yet with all this wealth, which he shared liberally with the poor—all this worldly good and honour—Vyas Shastree had two great cares which pressed upon him heavily, and were shared by his wife. The first was that he had no son; the second, that his beautiful daughter was already a virgin widow. And these were heavy griefs.

Anunda Bye had borne him two sons and a daughter, of which Tara was the first-born. The others had followed, and had died successively when giving promise of healthy childhood. In vain had the parents made pilgrimages to the shrines in the Dekhan after the death of the last son, and to Benares also, to propitiate Siva in his holiest of temples, and had from time to time remitted propitiatory gifts to his shrine—no further offspring followed. An heir was not only desirable for the property, which, in default of one, must devolve upon a very distant relative—but, in a higher degree, for the performance of those cere-

* *Vina*—a large lute or guitar with frets, and steel and copper strings.

monies for himself and his family after death, which could only be effectual from a son, real or adopted.

Often had Anunda urged him to marry again, and assured him of her love and protection to a young wife, as a mother or elder sister; and she had even named several parties of good family who would have considered an alliance with the Shastree a positive honour. Why should he not marry? He was yet comparatively young: men older than himself had married twice, nay thrice, or till the object of their desire was accomplished. Why should he not do the same? Was he too old at forty, nay, even less? So urged his wife and his best friends.

Yet the Shastree had not consented. The fact was, he loved Anunda very dearly; she had been a good and true wife to him. He feared, too, a certain imperious tone of temper which he could control, but which, in contact with a second and younger wife, might change to jealousy, and become, to say the least, inconvenient. Or, if he made new connections, there would be the usual tribe of new relations to provide for, or to trouble him with importunate demands. On the whole, it might be better to adopt a son of that distant cousin who lived at Nassuk, and bring him up as his own. In any form, his necessity was urgent, and Anunda grew more and more earnest about the matter, and had even induced Tara to join in it.

"If you had a son," she would say to her husband, "he would be a young man before you were old.

Even if you died, the property would descend to him, and the ceremonies would be properly performed. If you grew old, and I were with you, he would take care of us and of Tara. Who will do this now?"

Yes, the echo in his heart was sad enough. Who would do so? There might be two widows, perhaps, mother and daughter, both left to the mercies of distant relatives who had no personal knowledge of them, and to whom they would be as ordinary widows only, no matter what amount of property they had brought with them—shaven, dressed in the coarsest and scantiest raiment, and used for menial offices—perhaps worse. Yes! the echo—"who would do so?"—often as the words were said, fell heavily on the Shastree's heart; and recently he had told his wife that—"he would think about it if his life were spared for another year; until after the next unfavourable conjunction of planets"—"he would think about it;" and so Anunda, without making any formal propositions, was yet collecting information as to the appearance, character, property, and accomplishments of many girls in the neighbourhood, and, in short, wherever she had any acquaintance.

Most heavily, however, of all domestic cares, did the situation of his daughter oppress the Shastree. She was growing very beautiful; in his eyes supremely so. So kind, too, so loving, so thoughtful, so unselfish, so clever a scholar! She might have been a happy wife—ere this, perhaps, a happy mother — yet at sixteen she was a widow, with

a gloomy future: not felt as yet; for the girl had grown up with him, had shared in his studies, and had in all respects so entirely enjoyed her young and peaceful life, that any thought of change had never occurred to her.

She had been married at an early age, according to the custom of her sect—when, indeed, she was little more than six years old—to a youth, the son of a friend, who was one of the chief priests of the temple of Punderpoor, a lucrative office, and one which would devolve upon his son by hereditary right. The family was opulent, and the young man gave promise of learning and of character. No matter now; he was dead. Three years after the marriage he had been cut off suddenly by a fever, to the grief of his family and to the extinction of the Shastree's hopes for his daughter. Since then, with no further worldly hope before her, Tara had betaken herself to the study of the holy books, in which her father delighted; and, doomed as it were to a life of celibacy, had vowed it to the performance of religious exercises after the manner of her faith.

It was unusual then, that Bramhun girls were taught to read or write—more so than it is now; and in accordance with the rules of the sect and the customs of the country, Tara, had her husband lived, would ere now have joined him, and become mistress of his household—a sufficient distinction for a Bramhun girl; but before that event, the application of the child to such rudimental teaching as her father

had given her was so remarkable, that in process of years the conventional rules of the caste had been set aside, and it was a loving and grateful task to the father to lead his widowed daughter through the difficult mazes of Sanscrit lore, and find in hers an intellect and comprehension little short of his own.

Many of his friends shrugged their shoulders at this strange innovation of ordinary custom, and argued astutely, that it was a dangerous thing to fill a girl's mind with learning. Others, his enemies, were loud in their condemnation of the precedent it would afford to many, and the bad uses it could be put to; and in disputes upon the subject, texts were hurled at the Shastree by angry parties, to be answered, however, by appeals to ancient times, as illustrated in holy books, when women were deep scholars and emulated the men; and so Tara's desultory education went on. "After all, what does it matter?" said her father very frequently, if hard pressed by caste clamour; "she does not belong to the world now: God has seen it good to cut off her hopes: she has devoted herself to a religious life, and I am teaching her and preparing her for it."

But this did not satisfy the adverse Pundits, still less the fact that Tara as yet wore ordinary clothes, and her head as yet had not been shaved. The degradation of Bramhun widowhood had not been put on her; and she was too beautiful to escape notice, or the envious comments of others, both male and female.

The rites of widowhood must be performed some time or other. Her father and mother both knew that; they would have to take her to Punderpoor, or to Benares, or to Nassuk, or other holy city, and after ceremonials of purification, all that beautiful hair must be cut off and burned, the pretty chaste bodice discarded, and she must be wrapped, ever after, in a coarse white cotton—or silk—or woollen—sheet, and all other dresses of every kind or colour be unknown to her.

Ah! it seemed cruel to disfigure that sweet face which they had looked upon since she was a child, and had watched in all its growing beauty! Any other less pure, less powerful parents, would long ago have been obliged to comply with those cruel customs; and were they not performed every day at the temple itself? "Why should the rite be delayed?" said many; "the girl is too handsome; she will be a scandal to the caste. The excuses of going to Benares, or to Nassuk, are mere devices to gain time, and sinful." "The matter must be noticed to the Shastree himself, and he must be publicly urged and warned to remove the scandal from his house and from the sect, which had been growing worse, day by day, for the last three years."

Yes, it was true—quite true. Tara herself knew it to be true, and often urged it. What had she before her but a dreary widowhood? Why should she yet be as one who ostensibly lived in the world, and yet did not belong to it? For whom was she to dress her-

self and to braid her hair every day? For whom deck herself in jewels? She did not remember her husband so as to regret his memory. She had had no love for him. Married as a child, she had seen him but a few times afterwards, when he came to perform needful annual ceremonies in the house, and she had then looked up to him with awe. He had rarely spoken to her, for she was still a child when he died. Once she remembered, when he was on a visit, her father had made her recite Sanscrit verses to him, and read and expound portions of the Bhugwat Geeta,* and had said in joke that she would be a better Pundit than he was.

She remembered this incident better than any other, and soon after its occurrence he had died. Now she felt that, had he lived, she might have loved him, and the reproach of widowhood would not have belonged to her. These thoughts welled up often from her heart with grief, and yearning only known to herself, and as yet only half admitted: yet which increased sensibly with time, and recurred too, more frequently and painfully, as girls of her own age, honoured wives and happy mothers—girls who had already taken their places in life—met her at the temple with laughing crowing children on their hips, proud of their young maternity: or came to visit her, and spoke of domestic matters commonly—interests which she could never create or enjoy, and yet for which the natural yearning was ever present.

* The beautiful devotional episode in the Ramayun.

"Why did he go from me?" she would cry to herself, often with low moaning; "why leave me alone?" "Why did they not make me Sutee with him? Could I not even now be burned, and go to him?" And if these thoughts changed, it was to the idea of a new wife for her father, who, perhaps, would be as a sister. If a brother were born, what a new source of pleasant care and occupation! Yet this had its dark side also. "Would she be friendly to her and her mother? and if not——"

Her father and mother observed when gloomy thoughts beset her, and when she became excitable and nervous in her manner, and they did their best to cheer them away. "She might yet be happy in doing charitable acts," they said, "in reading holy books, in meditation, in pilgrimages; and they would go with her to Benares and live there." "Why not," the Shastree would say; "why not, daughter? We have but thee, and thou hast only us; it will be good to live and die in the holy city."

Well, it sufficed for the time, and there were intervals when people's tongues were quiet, and these were happy days because so tranquil, and Tara had given herself and her destiny into her father's hands.

"Do with me as thou wilt, O father," she said; "what is good to thee is best for me; but do not risk anything of thy honoured name for one so hopeless as I am. Why should I be a mockery to myself? It may cost me a pang to part with all these;" and she would pass her hand through those long, glossy, curl-

ing tresses; "and ye too will grieve to see them gone, and your poor Tara shaved and degraded; but there is no help for it, and the honour of your house is more to your daughter than these ornaments. Without them I should be a comfort to ye, and at peace with the world and with myself; with them, only a source of disgrace and calumny, and I were better dead. Yes, let us go to Benares, to Nassuk—anywhere—so that I leave my shame behind me."

If that poor struggling heart were laid open, was there nothing in its depths which, as she spoke it, combated this resolve fiercely and unremittingly? If it had not been so, she would have been more than human. There was the natural repugnant dread of this disfigurement and disgrace. Worse, far worse, the endurance of the after-life—the life of childless barren widowhood of which she knew and saw daily sad examples. She knew of the bitter experience of such widows, when all modest retirement, respect, and honour of virgin or married life was discarded with the ceremonial rites, and men's insult and women's contempt took their place: and that from this there was no refuge till death.

When she shuddered at these truths—they were no delusions and her soul rebelled against them—some ideal being, mingling his life with hers, caressing the beauty she was conscious of possessing, would present itself in dreamy visions, waking or sleeping, and beset her in terribly seductive contrasts. The very books she read offered such to her imagination. There

were no demigods now, no heroes fighting for the glory of Hinduism, as related in the Ramayun; but there were ideal examples of nobility—of bravery—of beauty, which enthralled her fancy, and led it to portray to her realities. Yet there was no reality, and could be none. She had not seen any one to love, and never could see any one. Who would care for her—a widow—who could love a widow? And yet the dreams came nevertheless, and her poor heart suffered terribly in these contests with its necessity. After all, it was more the calmness of despair than conviction of higher motive which brought to her lips words such as we have recorded:—"she would leave her shame behind her."

But her parents did not go, and the rites were deferred indefinitely. Last year they were to have gone to Nassuk for the purpose to their relatives; but the planets were not propitious, or the business of the temple and its ceremonies interfered. This year, when the cold season was nearly over, in the spring, at the Bussunt festival, if the conjunctions were favourable, "they would see about it." They did not get over the—"if."

So here were the two great cares of the household. Which was the heaviest? To the Shastree, certainly, Tara's ceremony of widowhood. His own marriage was a thing which concerned himself only, and, at the worst, he could adopt an heir; but that Tara should be a reproach to him, the revered Shastree and priest, and remain a reproach among women—it

could not be. The caste were becoming urgent, and the Gooroo, or spiritual prince, the "Shunkar Bhartee Swâmi," whose agents travelled about enforcing discipline and reporting moral and ceremonial transgressions, sent him word, privately and kindly, that the matter should not be delayed. He quite approved of the ceremony being performed at Benares or at Nassuk, out of sight, for the old man knew Tara—knew her sad history, and admired her learning and perseverance in study. At his last visit, two years before, he had put up in the Shastree's house, and had treated the girl as his daughter; but the requirements of the caste were absolute, and were she his own daughter he dared not to have hesitated.

But we have made a long digression.

"Come, daughter," said Anunda, "cast that sheet about thy head. It strikes me that men look at thee too earnestly now as we pass the bazaar, and the morning air is chill from the night rain."

"Nay, dear mother, not so. Am I a Toorki woman to veil my face?" said Tara, quickly. "Am I ashamed of it? Art thou, mother?"

"If thou wert not so beautiful, Tara. I dread men's evil eyes on thee, my child, and I dread men's tongues more."

"Ah, mother! I dread neither," replied the girl. "They have done me no harm as yet, and if my heart is pure and 'sutee'* before God and the Holy Mother, she will protect me. She has told me so

* Chaste and faithful.

often, and I believe it. Come—I think—I think," she added, with an excited manner, as she clasped her heavy gold zone about her waist, her bosom heaving rapidly beneath the silken folds over it, and her eyes glowing strangely, "I think, mother, she came to me last night in my dream. She was very beautiful, O, very beautiful! She took hold of my hair, and said, 'Serve me, Tara, I will keep it for thee.'"

"Tara! art thou dreaming still?" exclaimed Anunda. "Holy Mother! what light is in thine eyes? Put the thought far from thee, O dearest; it is but the echo of what thy father said last night when he comforted us both—it will pass away."

"Perhaps so, mother," answered the girl, abstractedly. "Yet it seemed so real, I think I feel the touch on my hair still. I looked at it when I rose, and combed it out, but I saw nothing. Yes, it will pass away—everything passes away."

"And what was she like, Tara?" asked her mother, unable to repress her curiosity.

"O mother, I was almost too dazzled to see. I am even now dazzled, and if I shut my eyes the vision is there. There!" cried the girl, closing her eyes and pointing forward, "there, as I saw it! The features are the same; she is small, shining like silver, and her eyes glowing, but not with red fire like those in the temple. O mother, she is gone!" she continued, after a pause, "she is gone, and I cannot describe her."

"Didst thou tell this to him — to thy father, Tara?" asked her mother, much excited.

"Yes, mother. I awoke before him and could not sleep again. I got up and drew water for him to bathe. I tended the fire, and sat down to read. Then he went and bathed; and when he had come out of the temple* and put on dry clothes, I read part of the 'Geeta' to him, but I was trembling, and he thought I was cold. Gradually I told him——"

"And what said he, daughter?" asked her mother, interrupting her.

"He seemed troubled, mother, and yet glad, I could not say which. He said he would ask 'the Mother' after the morning hymn was ended."

"Come then, Tara, we will go to him at once. Nay, girl, as thou art, thy words have given me strength, my pearl; come."

* Most Bramhuns perform their early morning worship after bathing in cold water, and with their garments still wet.

CHAPTER III.

THE Poorans relate that the goddess Doorga, Kalee, or Bhowani, the wife of Siva, once slew a frightful giant named Muhésha, having the head of a wild buffalo, to the great relief of the people who suffered from its existence; and Hindus generally believe that this event took place at Tooljapoor in the Dekhan. Toolja is another name for Bhowani or Kalee, and hence Tooljapoor—the city of Toolja. After the monster was slain, and the presence of the goddess was no longer required on earth, she left the form she had appeared in as witness of what had been done, changed it to stone, and it was in after years discovered in the ravine where the monster had been slain.

The image still remains where it is alleged to have been first found, and where certain miraculous indications of its presence were made. A temple was built over it, and a town gradually gathered round the temple, which became famous throughout India, and is frequented by pilgrims from all quarters. It is now the idol worshipped there, and is a figure of black marble, or perhaps basalt, highly polished, small, but of elegant

proportions, with features of the pure Hindu type. The eyes are composed of large uncut rubies; and, as the image stands upon its altar, clothed in a woman's garment, in the small dark sanctum of the temple, they have always a strange, weird, and, to the worshippers, a fascinating appearance, glittering through the gloom and smoke of lamps and incense always burning.

The temple is a very picturesque object, from its situation in a deep glen, the bottom of which is nearly filled by it. Pious worshippers, and votaries from time to time, have enriched it by buildings and courts surrounded by cloisters, ascending one above the other, connected by flights of steps: and in these courts are several cisterns, filled from springs in the sides of the hill. One of them, peculiarly sacred, as believed to come from the Ganges, gushes from a cow's mouth carved in the rock, and enters a large basin and reservoir: and in all these cisterns pilgrims to the shrine, both male and female, must bathe before they can worship the image. Crowded by these pilgrims from all parts of India, of various colours and physiognomies, languages and costumes, men and women,—bathing, ascending or descending the broad flights of steps, pouring into the lower courts in dense throngs, chanting mystic adorations, and singing hymns in different languages and accents; it is impossible to conceive a more picturesque or exciting scene than they present on occasions of particular festivals, or, in general, on the day of the full moon of every month.

The town of Tooljapoor adjoins the temple walls on three sides, and ascends from them—the terraced houses clinging, as it were, to ledges of the rugged glen—on the north and south. On the east, the ascent is more regular; and the principal street slopes from the crest of the tableland down to the first flight of steps leading to the first court, and thence down successive flights of steps, through other courts, to the lowest, which is the largest, and in which stands the principal shrine, surrounded by cloisters and other buildings. Large tamarind, peepul, and other trees, have grown accidentally among the cliffs around, or have been planted in the courts, and have flourished kindly, affording grateful shade; so the result, in the mingling of foliage and buildings of many styles in the temple—surrounded by the rugged sides of the ravine, occasionally precipitous:—and the terraced houses, temples, and other buildings of the town above them—is remarkably picturesque, and even beautiful.

The temple ravine opens into another of large dimensions which, in the form of an irregular semicircle, is perhaps a mile long by nearly half of a mile at the broadest part of the diameter, narrowing to its mouth. It is called the Ram Durra, and opens gradually beyond the hills, upon one of the great undulating plains of the Dekhan. To the north, the large ravine presents the appearance of an amphitheatre with precipitous sides, from which, in rainy weather, a number of small but lofty cascades de-

scend from the tableland above, and form the head of a small river which eventually falls into the Bheema.

The hills which bound the ravine are about four hundred feet high, and are, in fact, the edge of a very extensive plateau called the Bâlâ Ghaut, which extends nearly a hundred miles, with only a slight descent, towards the east; and, after ascending to the town of Tooljapoor from the ravine, a flat plain is reached, on which the greater portion of the town stands. One promontory of the entrance of the great ravine juts out past and bounds the temple on the left or south side, and along its face is the road by which the ascent is made from the plain below. The hill then turns round sharp to the east, with precipitous sides, leaving a level plain of a few hundred yards in width between the town and the declivity.

On the edge of this precipitous side, to the south, are two other temples, also holy. One, a tall octagon building, now covers the rock on which the goddess is stated to have alighted from heaven when she came to engage the monster who lived in the adjoining ravine; and the other, a little further on, and much more ancient, is situated at, and encloses the head of a spring which fills a cistern, as it trickles down the precipice at all seasons of the year. This is also a sacred place, and is called "Pâp-nâs," or "the sin-destroyer;" and the legend says that the goddess bathed in this spring, and washed the monster's blood from her hands, after she had slain him; so it is held sacred.

Truly the whole corner of the plateau is very beautiful. The quaint old town hanging literally on the mountain edge: the deep gloomy ravine of the temple opening out to the larger one: the precipices and rugged hills to the west and north, and the beautiful undulating plain to the south, over which the eye wanders as over a map for fifty miles or more, checkered with thriving villages and their rich fields and gardens,—form a striking assemblage of objects. But the interest centres in the temple itself, with its gilded spires and picturesque groups of buildings, as well as its strange effect in the position in which it has been placed, attesting, no doubt, in the opinion of the people—if there were any question on the subject—the truth of the legend.

It will be understood from the foregoing, that the town is situated considerably above the temple, and part of it on the level ground of the plateau or plain. The Shastree's house was on the edge of the crest of the ground, looking to the south over the ravine of the temple, the cliffs, and a portion of the town beyond, across the small plain which lay between the edge of the temple ravine and the precipitous side of the mountain, and thence over the plain which, in the far distance, mingled with the sky. To the south-east the line of hills was rugged and broken, descending by steep spurs into the lower plain; but from its edge, all round to the north, the eye followed a fair, rich country, sloping eastwards, covered

with grain-fields, through which the small river Boree, here only a brook, pursued a quiet course among the town gardens. Again, to the north and west, looking into and across the large wild ravine, were the precipices of the Ram Durra, and the rugged basalt hills beyond them. So, wherever you turned, it was a fair or wild scene alternately; and standing upon the terrace of the Shastree's house, or sitting in a small chamber which had been built over one of the corner rooms, you could see all that has been told; and very beautiful it was.

The Shastree had travelled in his pilgrimages all over India. He had seen wilder and grander scenes perhaps, but none pleasanter to live in, than this cool, breezy, healthful mountain town, enhanced by the presence of one of the holiest shrines in the country. Here he must bear his misfortune calmly; and though his necessity urged the change we have alluded to, he never issued from his door and looked over the fair prospect about him, or performed the sacrificial ceremonies at the temple, without being strengthened in his desire to live and die here; and therefore the struggle in regard to his daughter was the more bitter.

That morning he had risen unrefreshed—his sleep had been restless. Something in one of the books he had been explaining to Tara in the evening had brought up the subject of widowhood and its consequences and obligations, and the message of his spiritual prince had been discussed with much grief

and misery to all. There seemed to be no evasion of them possible—the rites must be fulfilled; and he had again spoken of Benares, and Tara had simply and meekly given herself into his hands, and prostrated herself before him and her mother in submission. She was no doubt excited; and her first communication in the morning startled him exceedingly.

You, O Christian reader! must not try his feelings by your own standard. You live under a holier and simpler faith. If in the ordinary occurrences of life, and its joys and sorrows, there is little difference between you, it is very different in regard to faith. You have but one object of calm, loving, trustful, humble adoration. He, as all educated Hindus, believed in the same one God, but it was overlaid by a gorgeous and picturesque mythology, and two distinctions of—as he believed them to be—heavenly beings, to whom separately and collectively worship was due, and yet whose interests and designs were so different and apparently irreconcilable.

His household faith was for the most part a pure theism; but circumstances arising out of hereditary rights had placed him at the head of the local worship of the dread goddess, whom, either lovingly or in deprecation of her possible wrath, he worshipped daily. But the worship of Doorga or Bhowani, as the wife of the creating and preserving power in her beneficence, and of the same power in her destroying aspect—in her wrath terrible and unrelenting—is perhaps more fascinating to women than to

men; and, alternating with both aspects, a woman in all moods and in all necessities, may most naturally perhaps apply to another woman, in whose power she believes, for sympathy and assistance. Has it not ever been so? Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Indian —nay, even Christian?

Nevertheless the Shastree believed, not lovingly perhaps, but in deprecation of wrath; while his wife and daughter, unable to follow the mystically subtle metaphysical creeds of the Veds and Shastras, saw in their Goddess enough to fill their hearts with practical faith in, and reliance upon, her power over their destinies. To her, both had addressed their vows and daily supplications, very simply and earnestly, for this devotion of their lives to her was all they could give, if their prayers were granted.

What wonder, then, that Tara's vision agitated him? The Shastree knew of many women on whom the spirit of the goddess in divine afflatus had descended. They were possessed by her: they spoke and prophesied when they were full of her presence: and he dreaded them while he worshipped the power displayed. As Tara told him her dream, and the service the Goddess had asked, could it be real? Could his daughter, as an inspired priestess, ever speak before the image? That, however, must be tried without delay, and he hastened more rapidly than usual to the temple, having bid her follow when her mother was ready.

He arrived as the ceremonies of bathing and dressing the image were being performed by the inferior

priesthood, and, these concluded, the morning service began. We need not detail it—the decking of the altar with flowers, the marking the forehead of the image with the sacred colours, the offerings of daily food and sacred elements with flowers, and the singing of mystic hymns. Vyas Shastree was speedily joined by other Bramhuns and priests, and bareheaded, naked to the waist, carrying the sacred fire and sacrificial offerings, and chanting hymns with the accompaniment of clashing cymbals and lutes. Thus the procession was passing round and round the temple, and the simple but strange melody rising and falling amidst the buildings, trees, and cliffs, and filling the ravine with sound, as Tara and her mother gained the outer gate, and began to descend the steps which led to the lower court.

Ordinarily they did not bathe in the sacred cistern where, from the carved stone cow's mouth, the stream of the holy spring gushed sparkling into the basin; but Tara paused as they passed it. She had felt more and more excited as she neared the temple, and the melody of the hymn and the clashing of the cymbals, as they came up together through the trees in the still air, had added to the effect already produced in her mind by her dream.

"Mother," she said, hesitatingly—"mother, ought I not to bathe here? Can I go into the presence, even with these garments on me, after what the Holy Mother said last night? They should be wet and pure."

"It is too cold for thee, my child," replied Anunda. "Come, Tara, come on; the hymn will be finished ere we can join—come."

"No, mother, I am hot—burning; something urges me to the well, and I cannot resist it. Mother, I must be pure before the shrine. May I go?"

"The spirit of the goddess is with her, truly," thought her mother. "Go, Tara, it may refresh thee," she said; "and there are dry clothes in the temple. Go, be quick, my child!"

The girl descended the steps into the basin, and, turning to the east, poured libations from her hands to the four quarters of the earth; then the three libations to the sun, saying a short hymn from the Veda. Then followed her prayer to the goddess. "Holy Mother, do what thou wilt with me; take me, leave me, or use me as thou wilt, but do not cast me away! Behold, I come!" Then she stepped forth from the basin, her silk garment clinging to her sweet form, and revealing its perfect proportions more than the innate modesty of her mind permitted; hastily, therefore, she shook it free from her limbs, while her mother wrung the water from the ends.

"I am ready now," she said, simply; "come, mother, I will go to her pure, and sit before her. If she wants Tara she will speak. Come!"

Her mother had observed her glistening eye and glowing cheek, which even the chill of the water did not subdue, and seeing the expression of her face, as she ascended from the basin, was changed from

its habitual sadness to one of excited triumph, she caught the infection herself, and seized Tara by the hand. "Come," she cried, "Jey Kalee," "Victory to Kalee!" And so they descended the steps more rapidly, while the music of the hymn and the clash of the deep-toned cymbals resounded through the lower court, and seemed to be echoed and repeated in the cliffs and buildings above and around them.

The procession of Bramhuns and priests was turning the corner of the temple as Tara and her mother met it in the full swell of the music. Usually the girl and her mother fell in behind, reverentially and calmly, and followed it as it passed round. Now, however, the Shastree and his companions were amazed to see Tara separate herself from her mother, and put herself at the head of the party, toss her arms into the air, and join in the hymn they were singing—leading them on more rapidly than they had moved before. The Shastree marked that she had bathed, and that her wet garments dripped as she went along. "She is pure," he thought; "she has prepared herself, and if the goddess will take her, it is her will. There is something in this that cannot be stayed."

The other Bramhuns stopped, still chanting, and looked to Vyas Shastree with wonder for some explanation, which was as quickly given. "The goddess spoke to her last night, and will not be repelled," he said. "Go on, do not stop her; let her do as she lists."

No one dared stop her, or touch Tara. The height of excitement, or, as they thought, inspiration, was in her eye, and that sweet face was lifted up with a holy rapture. She seemed to fly rather than to walk, so completely had her feelings carried her forward; and as she moved she looked behind to those following, still chanting with them, her arms waved above her head, and beckoning them onwards. They could not resist the influence. So they passed on, round and round the temple, still singing. Other morning worshippers, attracted by the strange sight, joined them, or stood by wondering till the hymn was finished. Then Tara, noticing no one, entered the porch of the temple rapidly, and, advancing alone, knelt down before the door of the inner shrine in front of the image, and they watched her silently.

What did she see to cause that earnest look? The image was familiar to all. The light of the lamps within shone out strongly on the kneeling figure, shrouded in its wet clinging drapery, but hardly illuminated the gloomy space in the deep outer vestibule, around which the spectators arranged themselves reverentially. The ruby eyes of the Goddess glittered with a weird brilliance from among the cloud of incense burning before her; and the fragrant smoke, issuing from the door, wreathed itself about her form and ascended to the roof, and hung about the pillars of the room.

Those looking on, almost expected the image would move, or speak, in greeting or in reprehension of the

young votary, and the silence was becoming almost oppressive when the girl's lips moved: "Mother," she cried, in her low musical voice—"Mother! O Holy Mother! Tara is here before thee. What wouldst thou of her?" And she leant forward, swinging her body to and fro restlessly, and stretching forth her hands. "Mother, take me or leave me, but do not cast me away!" She could only repeat this simple prayer, for the yearning at her heart could find no other words; but her bosom heaved as though it would burst the bodice, and her hands and arms, with her whole frame, trembled violently.

"She is possessed, brother," said another priest to her father. "What hath come to her? When did this happen?"

"Peace," said the father, in a hoarse whisper; "disturb her not: let what will happen, even if she die. She is in hands more powerful than ours, and we are helpless. O Tara, my child! my child!"

"Mother, dost thou hear? I will do thy bidding," again murmured the girl. "Come, come! as thou wast in my dream. So come to Tara! Ah, yes, she comes to me! Yes, Holy Mother, I am with thee;" and, stretching forth her arms, she sank down on her face, shuddering.

"She is dying; my child! my pearl!" cried her mother, frantically, who had been with difficulty restrained, and who rushed forward. "Will none of ye help?"

"Touch her not, Anunda," exclaimed her hus-

band, holding her back; "this brooks no interference. Let her lie and do as the mother would wish her; this will pass away." So they gathered round Tara and watched her. She was tranquil now, not shuddering: the fair round arms were stretched out towards the shrine, and the light fell on the rippled glossy hair, which had escaped from the knot behind, and hung over her face and neck, shrouding them in its heavy waves.

"Let us chant the hymn to the praise of Doorga," said the old Pundit who had before spoken; "brothers, this is no ordinary occurrence. Many come and feign the divine afflatus, but there hath been nothing so strange as this in my memory;" and, striking a few chords on the vina he held in his hand, the hymn—a strange wild cadence—was begun. The sound filled the vaulted chamber, and was taken up by those outside who crowded the entrance. Still she moved not, but lay tranquilly; the full chorus of the men's voices and the clashing of the cymbals were not apparently heeded by her. As it died away, there was a faint movement of the arms, and gradually she raised herself to her knees, tossed back the hair from her face and neck, which fell over her shoulders and back, and looked around her wildly for a moment; then, seeing her mother, she leaned towards her as she advanced, and, stretching forth her arms and clasping her knees, hid her face in her garment, and sobbed convulsively.

"My child, I am here; I am with thee," said

Anunda, supporting her, and herself sobbing hysterically. "Speak! what is it? What hast thou seen? My daughter, my sweet one, O speak to us!"

"Water, mother, water! my throat is parched! I cannot speak. Is she gone?"

"Who, Tara?"

"The Holy Mother; she was with me—she entered into me. O mother, what can I do? Where am I?"

"Here is water for thee, Tara; drink."

She tried to do so, but gasped at every attempt; at last she swallowed a little, and was relieved. "She was not angry, mother," she said, smiling. "Did you not hear her speak? What did I answer?"

"No, my child," said her father; "thou wert silent, and we feared the goddess had taken thy spirit; but thou livest, and we are grateful."

Tara turned to her father with an imploring look for silence, and again, but now calmly, prostrated herself before the image, while the brilliant ruby eyes seemed, to those who beheld them, to glow still more brightly through the smoke of the incense.

"Holy Mother of the gods," she said, in a low voice of prayer, "I am thy slave. I fear thee no longer. Blessed Mother, I will love thee, who art kind to Tara. . . . Here will I live and die with thee according to thy word." Then she arose and continued to him: "Come, father; behold, I am calm now."

"She is accepted, brethren," said the old priest, turning to the others; "let us do her honour. With no life for the world, let her widowhood remain in

the Mother's keeping: she has chosen her, let no man gainsay it. Come, daughter, let me mark thee as she would have it done;" and, entering the shrine, he took several of the garlands from the neck of the image, and a small vessel containing water in which were the leaves of the sacred Toolsee; dipping his finger into which, he marked her gently on the forehead, sprinkling some on her head, on which he placed his hands as he said the incantation which denoted the presence of the divinity. Then he hung the garlands about her neck, and the fragrant red powder of the morning sacrifice being handed to him, he drew some gently across her forehead and bade her stand up.

"Jey Toolja!" "Victory to Toolja!" was shouted by the attendant priests and worshippers. "Victory to the Holy Mother!" "Victory to her votary!" "Let us take her in procession!" "Let us go with her!" cried all around.

"Ah, no, friends," said the girl, rising modestly; "ye see but a poor helpless child who was in grief, and whom the Mother has comforted. Leave me! let me go! I would go home. Mother, take me away! Father, do thou come with me!"

"It may not be, daughter," said the old priest, kindly; "we must neglect nothing, else it were dangerous for thee and for us. Bring a palkee,"* he shouted to the attendant priests, "and get the music ready, and flowers too, and offerings for the Pâp-nâs.

* An open litter.

Yes, brother," he continued to her father, "for once I usurp thy office; thou knowest what is needed. Come, let us not delay."

Tara looked imploringly at her father; she would fain have escaped the public procession if she could. She only wanted now to get home unperceived, and to hide herself in her chamber. What had she done to be so honoured—to be so noticed?

"It must be, my child," he said; "this cannot be begun and abandoned; let not thy heart fail thee, the Holy Mother will be with thee. Come!"

Tara yielded: she bent reverently before the old priest, and touched his feet, then her father's, and going round the Bramhuns assembled she did the same; last of all her mother's, who was sobbing, yet not in sorrow. "Come," she said, "I am ready; do with me as ye list. Ye are my elders, and I obey."

CHAPTER IV.

So they led Tara forth and placed her in the open palankeen, and, as they decked her with flowers, and strewed garlands over its canopy, the temple music struck up a joyous marriage measure. Then, as the bearers moved gently forward, her father and mother holding the sides of the litter, the priests arranged themselves on all sides of it, and began another solemn chant of victory to the goddess.

By this time, news of the event had passed on into the town, and it was the hour when all the people were astir. Men and women, collected in groups, heard strange tales of how the goddess had appeared to Tara and taken her away to heaven; again, that she had died before the shrine, and they were bringing away her body. The general conviction was, that she had died, and many women, collected in knots, were weeping bitterly and beating their breasts. But as the temple trumpets and conchs blew a sudden and quivering blast, and the glad music was heard with the chant, now rising, now falling, as the procession slowly ascended the steps, and tra-

versed the court,—and at last, as it emerged from the gateway and entered the broad street which led to the centre of the town,—the popular enthusiasm knew no bounds. "Jey Toolja!" "Jey Kalee!" "Bome! Bome!" the cries of victory—were taken up from those who led the procession, leaping and shouting. Many ran for incense or for garlands: men and women thronged from street and alley and joined the procession as it moved up; others stood upon the terraces of their houses and waved garments or handkerchiefs, or hung out cloths from the balconies and windows. "Jey Toolja!" "Jey Bhowani!" shouted all who came. Pilgrims from the Ganges, Sunniasis holding aloft their withered arms; Gosaees with their orange clothes and matted locks, strange, wild, eerie folk,—issued from archways where they had slept, or vaults where they had lodged; and still the crowd swelled, and the shouting, and through all, and over all, the solemn chant and the hoarse and shrill quivering notes of the trumpets.

Few knew why this was, but the procession advanced out of the temple gate, so it belonged to it; and as the girl passed, seated calmly now in her litter, flowers were cast on her, incense was burned before her, and fragrant powder thrown over her, with blessings. Her old friends, the flower-sellers, emptied their morning baskets of jessamine over her, and touched her feet reverentially; and the old confectioner, who had always kept a sweet morsel for his young friend, threw showers of comfits upon her litter, and in his

excitement generously flung the contents of his baskets among the crowd.

So they passed on, through the eastern gate, and over the plain which led to the Pâp-nâs temple, and the sun was now rising over the distant purple hills in great glory among gorgeous golden clouds. As the first beams fell upon the procession, the priests changed their hymn to that in adoration of the Sun, from the Vedas, which we adopt from a free translation:—

"Risen in majestic blaze,
Lo the Universe's eye,
Vast and wondrous host of rays,
Shineth brightly in the sky.

. . . . .

"See, he followeth the Dawn,
Brilliant in the path above,
As a youth by beauty drawn
Seeks the maiden of his love.

"Hear us, O ye gods, this day!
Hear us graciously, we pray;
As the Sun his state begins,
Free us from all heinous sins.

"Mitra, Varun, Aditi—
Hear, O hear us graciously!
Powers of Ocean, Earth, and Air,
Listen, listen, to our prayer."*

And the people still shouted the cry of the Goddess, or joined in the hymn of the priests, till the small temple was reached.

The ceremonies there were brief and simple. Tara

* 'Specimens of Old Indian Poetry, translated from the original Sanskrit.' By R. T. H. Griffith, A.M.

bathed in the sin-cleansing basin, but she would not change her wet garments, still resisting her mother. Once more were holy texts and incantations said over her by all the priests collectively; and for the last time they led her round and round the little shrine and court of the spring, chanting a hymn of praise; her father leading, but submitting to the old priest who has already been mentioned. It was finished, and her new life began. The excitement which had possessed her and carried her on was already passing away, and giving place to a sick weariness and irrepressible languor, which not only her face but her limbs expressed.

"She will need careful tending for a long time, brother," said the old priest to her father. "Give her a cooling drink of toolsee and tamarinds, sweetened with honey; put her into dry clothes, and let her rest quietly; she may not even speak for many days; for so I have known it. Let us take her home."

"I am thankful to ye all, friends and brethren," said the Shastree, much affected. "This manifestation hath filled me with many cares, for we were not votaries of the Goddess: Now she hath come into the house, and the service she exacts is rigid, yet we will obey and do her will. If ye will depart and leave us, take my blessing."

"Nay, say not so," cried all who were near. "Let us take her home; and in honour and duty let this rite be finished." So the procession was again formed, and in the same order that it had reached the temple,

it again returned to the town-gate, and wound through the streets, thronged with curious gazers, to the door of the Shastree's dwelling, where the priest and Bramhuns were dismissed with thanks, and those only remained who were specially bidden to do so.

Tara's exhaustion had been increasing since the ceremony was concluded; and the wet garments about her, which had not been felt while the excitement lasted, now struck a chill into her which even dry clothes, cast over her by her mother, did not remove. She could not speak, and could hardly move from the litter as it was set down; and when, supported by her mother and the servants, she reached the inner apartment, she sank helplessly in her mother's arms. But she was now in gentle, careful hands, and at rest; and though she did not speak as yet, her grateful looks erelong expressed all the consciousness her mother longed to see.

She had ever after only a confused recollection of what had occurred; and even as they came home there was a vacancy in her look which had seriously alarmed her parents. Her father could remember many such votaries, in whom the light of reason had been utterly quenched, and he trembled for his daughter. We can account for the occurrence by rational causes: a long-continued mental excitement and suppressed care brought on by the nature of her own belief in, to her, that goddess of dread power, yet of sympathy with human requirements,—and its hysterical effect; but to her father, and more so to her mother,

as also to all the priests of the temple and people of the town, it was a manifestation of the divine interest, and a claiming of the girl for her own peculiar service.

We will not follow the conference between the Shastree and his friends, which related to ceremonies to be performed and sacrifices to be offered: nothing must be neglected. One of them was the resident agent of the spiritual prince before alluded to, who had only a few days before delivered the friendly warning, now unneeded. "The Mother hath settled this matter herself, friends," he said, "and no one can resist it; we will write collectively to the 'Swami,' and tell him of it; he, too, will be assured that this divine favour is the result of Vyas Shastree's piety, and his daughter's devotion to religious rites; better this than worldly allurements and ties, sweet as they are."

There was no dissentient voice. Nor in the town, nor among the caste, could any one impugn the act. It had been involuntary and public. Thousands had witnessed it, and they bore testimony of the holy fervour which had animated all who accompanied Tara from the temple. All seemed to have caught a portion of the divine manifestation and enthusiasm.

So every one said that the beautiful daughter of Vyas Shastree had become a Moorlee or priestess of the temple, and that the goddess herself had called her from her disgrace of widowhood to the glory of her own service. Was not this better than worldly ties? Now she was free!

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Did Tara think so? It was many weeks ere the feverish excitement passed away, during which the loving eyes glowed with unnatural lustre, and a fierce fire seemed to possess her. It was to be expected; and she had skilful and tender attendance. With perfect rest and quiet, and simple remedies, it would pass away, they said, and it did so gradually, and Tara arose weaker, but calm. By-and-by she would be allowed to make her sacrificial offerings, but not yet; and till then her beloved books, the household worship, and occupation, were enough to occupy her.

"Time enough," said the old Pundit, who frequently visited her and had become interested in her, "with a life of service to be done. When you are strong you shall come to us, but not till then."

Was Tara satisfied? If the dread of her shame had been removed, the void in her heart had not as yet been filled; but the new life had to begin, and she would do her best, and so she comforted herself.

Were others satisfied? Yes. As we have said, most who knew her envied her lot, but some sneered, and already shook their heads.

One man had looked at the distraught girl, as she was placed in the litter and covered with garlands, who was satisfied, yet not as the rest. More beautiful in the unconsciousness of her excitement than he had ever seen her before,—far more so, to his sight, than she had ever appeared while ordinarily attending the temple worship with her mother, and where he had watched her for months past, Moro Trimmul

had joined the throng in order to observe her better. Being a Bramhun, he had closed up to the edge of the litter bareheaded and unnoticed, singing the hymns as one of the attendant priests, and had thus been able to accompany the procession, gloating upon the girl's loveliness with an unholy desire. As the litter was taken up he fell out of the procession, and, watching it depart, sat down alone on the edge of the cliff looking over the plain, and by the side of the small stream which, issuing from the Pâp-nâs temple, fell down the face of the rock in a sheet of foam. A girl's voice aroused him from a reverie which we dare not follow.

"So the Pundit is not dancing back to the town as he came out, before the new Moorlee," she said ironically.

"Nor thou either, Gunga. Dost thou not welcome a new priestess?"

"I marvel at it," she continued, with a sneer; "thou wast looking enough at her. I dance before her? When she dances with us before the Mother, then she will be a true Moorlee—not else. Now I hate her; I shall always hate her."

"Ah! she will never join ye," he returned; "she is of another sort than the rest of ye: Gunga, thou art jealous of her beauty, girl."

"By the Holy Mother, she shall not remain so, Moro Trimmul. She—a widow—to think of setting herself above us! That cat-faced girl! If she has chosen to serve the Mother she must obey her rules,

and be one of us. Think ye we will let her come there unless she is?"

The Bramhun shook his head. "I was thinking about her," he said, absently.

The girl sighed. "I thought so," she replied, "and thou wilt love me no more—no more now. Is it not so? say it, if it is to be so."

"Love thee!" returned the man, bitterly—"yes, as thou canst be loved—by gold. Hark ye, Gunga, make her as thou art; get her into my power, and I will give thee a waistbelt of gold."

"As heavy as hers?" cried the girl, excitedly.

"Thou shalt weigh the one against the other and thine shalt turn the scale—will that content thee?"

"Wilt thou?—shall it? Swear on my neck and my feet to give this, and I will do thy will. Yes, to humble her pride and her father's—who drove me from the temple one day, and I have hated him ever since. I shall hate thee too, afterwards; yet I will do it," cried the girl, excitedly, clapping her hands—"yet I will do it."

"I swear," said the man, touching her neck. "Come and sit here by me." She did so, but neither spoke for some time.

"Thou hast a sister, Moro Pundit, and she is beautiful. She ought to have been married ere this. A little more time, and can it be done?" she said, breaking the silence.

The Bramhun winced. "She was betrothed once," he said, "but the man died."

"Perhaps she was married," continued the girl, with a sneer, "and she is as Tara Bye, or worse. Is it not so?"

"No! by the Holy Mother, no!" cried the Pundit, sharply, and with flashing eyes. "Breathe such a thing and I will have thy life. Beware what thou sayest, even to me! A word more, and I fling thee down the precipice!"

"O, I fear not for my life," said the girl, carelessly; "the Mother takes care of that, and I will say nothing, lest I should lose my pretty gold zone. But what of thy sister? The Shastree wants a new wife, we hear; Anunda Bye wants a son to cheer her and him, and why should not thy sister be taken there? If I do not err, she can have her chance. She is of a good age—why not? Could she understand what to do? Could she be taught?"

"Ah!" said the Pundit, abstractedly, "I had thought of it too, but it seemed impossible. I do not know him—yes—if——"

"If?—why if? Art thou afraid? The girl is here—let me see her and know her, and leave the rest to us."

"Gunga," said the Bramhun, after a pause. "If thou canst bring this about—if thou canst get me speech of this Shastree——"

"Let me speak to the girl first. 'Radha,' that is her name, is it not? Let me see if she is resolute and as I hear of her. If she be, she shall have her desire; thou shalt have thine; and I—ah, yes! I

will have more gold. Yes," she cried, clapping her hands again, "more gold! I will have gold anklets, like Tara's. Why should she wear gold anklets and mine be only silver? Wilt thou give them? —all I can hope, now she hath taken thy love from me——"

"When my sister is Vyas Shastree's wife thou mayst have what thou wilt, Gunga. I swear it to thee on thy neck and feet. Art thou content? Yes, thou shalt see her now. Manage the matter as ye will, women's wits are sharper than mine. Now follow me unobserved," he said, rising.

"Once more, Moro Pundit," continued Gunga, "tell me if the marriage can be performed now? Is there a fitting conjunction of planets?—within a month?"

"Yes; till the Now Ratree;* after that not for a long time."

"Enough to do, enough to do, in the time," muttered the girl to herself. "Hast thou any women with thee—any relations?"

"Yes, her mother's sister — a widow; no more. Our mother is dead, my father is dead, and there are only ourselves left of a large family."

"Then the Shastree will like the connection all the better, and—ye are rich, they say. Yes, I will bring the widow and Anunda together."

"We have enough. In that respect I can satisfy the Shastree fully."

* Nine nights of Bhowani before the Dusséra festival.

"Ah! he will ask no questions. His wife is shrewd and clever, and will guide him," she replied; "but he will be careful about the horoscope of thy sister, for he is a great astrologer."

"My aunt is wise, as you will find when you know her; and as for the rest, Gunga, it is in my hands. I, too, am an astrologer, and can cast Radha's nativity as I please."

The girl laughed heartily. "Yes, it will answer," she said. "Now go by that path; we must not be seen together. I will come to thee before noon; we have no time to lose. Only remember thine oath, Moro Trimmul, and beware how thou triest to evade or deceive me. I would not hurt thee willingly; and for the sake of—— No matter now," she continued, gulping down what was rising in her throat, "no matter now. It is gone—I see no more of it in thine eyes."

"I am in thy hands, Gunga, and may be trusted," he replied; "nay, more, there may be better days for thee yet, girl——"

"No—no more. No more like the old ones," she said, shaking her head mournfully. "Only the gold now—only the gold!"

CHAPTER V.

"YES, surely it is strange that the two nativities should fit so exactly," said Vyas Shastree to himself, some days after the events recorded in the last chapter, as, seated by himself upon his dais, and having given orders not to be disturbed, he appeared absorbed in a table of nativity which lay before him; "yes, it is strange indeed. The date of birth, the signs under which she was born, and the few calculations which have been made by a master hand, all agree, as they ought to do; and the result, as I have worked it out, is clear enough. This girl, born at Wye, an utter stranger to me hitherto, and brought here by a chance pilgrimage, is proposed for me; and Anunda, Tara, and the old Josee,* will have it so. Yes, it is a curious coincidence indeed; but let me test these formulæ again; there may be error."

While the Shastree is busy with some curiously abstruse calculations upon his own and the other horoscope he is considering, we must digress a little, to show by what steps Gunga's plans, roughly shadowed

* *Josee*—astrologer.

out to Moro Trimmul, as we have recorded, were apparently fast approaching a satisfactory completion.

Negotiations had been satisfactorily opened by Anunda with Sukya Bye, the aunt of Moro Trimmul. This lady had, indeed, already become a great favourite with Anunda and Tara, and she had been guided in her intercourse with them by the directions of Gunga. Eventually, the question of marriage, or otherwise, having passed the ladies favourably, rested with the Shastree himself.

The contrivances by which this result had been brought about were apparently too simple to cause suspicion. Yet they had been produced by carefully designed arrangement. It was first of all necessary to get Sukya Bye and Anunda acquainted, and this was brought about at the temple on the night of the ceremonies of the last full moon. The wife of the chief priest had the power to render the performance of the necessary worship convenient to any one she pleased. She could direct special attendance by assistant priests on her friends, and could reserve seats for them, on which they could see and hear to the best advantage. So as Sukya Bye, whose figure and dress bespoke her rank and respectability, was apparently vainly endeavouring to reach the shrine to make her offerings with other women, — Gunga, seeing her hustled and pushed about, assisted her as far as possible; and, feigning to be unable to do more, appealed to Anunda, who had herself noticed the old lady's struggles, for assistance to her.

Sukya Bye was one with whom it was no degradation to be seen associating. Her tall figure, dressed in the richest of plain silk garments, and the heavy gold rings she wore round her arms, wrists, and ankles, betokened wealth, as did her shaved head that she was a widow; and the stout Mahratta servingmen, who, armed with sword and buckler, attended her, proved that she was of some rank, certainly of very respectable position.

Gunga had left her under Anunda's care, and ere the ceremony was concluded the ladies had become excellent friends. It will be remembered that Anunda herself was from the western provinces of the Dekhan, and the dialect and intonation of the lady Sukya sounded pleasantly in her ears. Questions were asked, some mutual acquaintances discovered, and a visit by Anunda soon followed.

Moro Trimmul, his aunt, and sister, lived or lodged but a short distance from the Shastree, and it soon came to pass that the ladies visited each other frequently. Sukya had a point to gain, so had her niece Radha, and both worked in concert with the girl Gunga, to whom whatever happened was related. Her fresh instructions from day to day guided them perfectly, not only to gaining the goodwill of mother and daughter, but of establishing a more affectionate interest in their concerns than would otherwise have arisen out of a common acquaintance.

Sukya, proud of her own birth and connections, found Anunda perfectly in accord with herself on

that subject. She saw the wealth and comfort of the house, she led Anunda to detail their domestic cares, and offered her sympathy, which was accepted. "Ah, yes, if the Shastree would only marry again!" said Anunda to her in confidence, "and there should be a son born, they would take him to Benares and devote him to Siva. They had wealth; yet without this it was a weight and a care to them, which increased rather than diminished."

During these visits of confidence between the elders, Tara and Radha had their own pleasant time too, and Tara's trustful nature was easily won by the other. Radha was ignorant, it was true, but she was to all appearance open-hearted and simple, and she soon learned to feign that reverential yet intimate association with the beautiful widow and her mother, which Gunga counselled, and which was indeed necessary to the success of the whole scheme.

For some days Anunda made no communication to Sukya Bye of the subject nearest her heart; but as she saw the intimacy of the two girls increase, and that the intercourse had served to turn Tara's thoughts into new channels, and also that she herself, as she gradually gained strength, always found some pretext for a daily visit to her young friend, the thought gradually pressed the more upon her mind, that here was a connection which was most desirable for her husband; and, finally, the question alone remained, whether Radha's family would consent.

Tara had no objection either. Indeed, from the first

sight of Radha's present extreme beauty, and promise of its development—from her respectful, nay reverential, demeanour to her mother, and her apparently loving trustfulness of herself—she, too, began to think that a better selection could not be made, if her father were willing to take a second wife, than this girl. So she grew to wish it.

Therefore, with much exhortation to privacy, and in the fullest assurance of confidence, Anunda had ventured to ask Sukya Bye, after all reserve had been broken down, whether the alliance might be hoped for. She dwelt at length upon her husband's accomplishments and his wealth. He was not old; many men married far beyond his age. Money was no object—it could be paid if necessary; and she herself would be as a mother, and Tara a sister, to the new wife. In short, Anunda opened her whole heart to her new friend, and in the end found the sympathy she had expected.

Yes, the more Sukya Bye considered the matter, the more, as she told Anunda, was she convinced it would be an admirable arrangement. Radha had once been betrothed as a mere child; the person had died lately, else they were to have been married this year. Delay had occurred because the intended husband was poor. He had not sufficient to pay the expenses of the ceremonies. Then Radha's father had died, then her mother, when Moro Trimmul was as yet a youth. He had made no provision for his sister. How could he? So she remained unmarried.

Another connection must have been sought for this year, and Anunda's proposal was admirably timed.

Now, all this was true enough in some respects, but not entirely. It was enough, however, for two persons to believe, whose affections were already enlisted in the progress of the matter; and such inquiries as they could make from people who knew Wye, confirmed what had been told them by their new acquaintance.

Was the girl herself willing? Apparently she was. And she received, with all the bashfulness and interest necessary to the occasion, the proposal made to her by Tara on the part of her mother. Anunda had had her fears on this subject, lest the young and beautiful girl should refuse to ratify what her aunt had proposed; but beyond a natural shyness there seemed no objection.

One doubt only remained,—were the horoscopes of the parties in good accordance? "Moro Trimmul," Sukya Bye said, "would never consent to give his sister where the planets did not provide good fortune—in short, till he was satisfied there was no ceremonial objection or direct hindrance. And before the proposition was made to the Shastree—before, in short, the men were to discuss the proposed arrangement, Moro Trimmul wished to see the Shastree's horoscope, in order that the last point of doubt should be removed." He also would give his sister's to the Shastree, if the proposal were to be persevered in.

Very unsuspectingly, therefore, did Anunda take

the scheme of her husband's nativity, his "Junum Putr,"* from the casket in which it was kept, and, with many injunctions as to its safety, gave it to Sukya Bye. It was not long detained; and she was gratified by hearing that the Josee,† seated in an adjoining apartment, considered it a most happy one. "Might he copy a few portions? they had been so admirably calculated." And the dame had no objection.

Certainly the plan had been well laid, and as yet well executed. No very deep persuasions were necessary with these simple unsuspecting people. The mother and daughter had yielded long ago; and the result of the examination of the Shastree's Junum Putr had removed the last obstacle which concerned him. The matter, as arranged, should be broken to him that evening on his return from the temple. And the lady Sukya suggested that he should examine her niece's horoscope as corroborative of his own.

So Moro Trimmul had that day put the finishing touch to his work. He had been concealed when the lady Anunda brought the paper we have mentioned; he had rapidly copied the principal points in the table, and noted all the most remarkable of the latter indications exhibited; and he knew that, before evening, he could prepare a corresponding document regarding his sister, which the Shastree himself could not detect. This was a branch of science which Moro Trimmul had studied deeply; and it was with

* Lit., Birth letter. † Astrologer.

perfect confidence that he followed the astrological combinations relating to the Shastree, and constructed, yet not with too minute detail, the table in his sister's name.

Few Hindu parents care to have the Junum Putr, or "birth letter," of their daughters worked out; but after Moro Trimmul had cast the table itself on an imaginary date of birth, two years later than the real age of his sister, and as if it had been done carelessly and then abandoned, he followed up several of the formula indicated, leaving the last incomplete. He felt assured, therefore, when the paper was submitted to the Shastree, that he would himself carry out the last calculation, which had been so arranged as to lead to the present time, and to a combination with his own.

All had been finished. The paper on which it was written was new, but it was not paper of that part of the country; it was from his own district. An ornamental border was quickly drawn round it, in red, black, and yellow lines; the signatures of the witnesses to his sister's original and true Junum Putr were carefully copied; finally, the whole document was held over wood-smoke till it was of a proper brown colour, then rubbed and frayed at the edges, and creased here and there as if it had been often examined; and, lastly, it was perfumed with camphor to remove the smell of wood-smoke, and with the odour of benzoin and sweet pastille. No one, without much difficulty, could have detected the

forgery; and, without suspicion, the Shastree had set himself to work out the problem left unfinished—the occupation which we have already noted.

On leaving their friends, after this early visit, in which the Junum Putr was taken, Anunda and Tara had determined to lose no further time in breaking the matter to the Shastree. It was a fortunate day, as they had been told by the old astrologer, the Shastree's friend, whom they had consulted as they went home; whatever they did was sure to prosper. The Shastree was in good humour with himself, with them, and with the world generally, and for many reasons. His greatest care about Tara had been removed. She had been accepted as a votary of the Goddess, and had already recovered from her excitement. He had written with others a joint petition to the "Swami" on the subject, and she had been duly recognised by her spiritual prince. No fear of reproach now existed; and if the Shastree had at first winced at the idea of his daughter becoming a Moorlee, a public votary at the temple, the feeling was passing away. The gods forbid she should become as other girls, who were devoted to the temple service! No; she desired to be pure, and should continue so.

The long and expensive journey to Nassuk, or worse, to Benares, had been saved, and half a year's rent had just come in from his estate. The crops were fine; there were no remissions needed; prices were high, and the rent had been punctually paid.

The produce of the gardens and farms was also good this year, and the fees and dues from pilgrims were abundant. This was a special year for pilgrimages to the shrine, and full moon after full moon the crowd would increase.

"What are we to do with it all?" Anunda would ask, as day after day the bag containing the Shastree's dues was brought from the temple by the attendant clerk, or as her husband gave over to her the liberal gifts presented to him by wealthy visitors to the shrine.

As she asked this question of him, the Shastree laughed, and told her it must increase, for the Now Ratree, or nine nights of the Goddess, then coming on, were attended by a wonderful conjunction of planets foreboding marvellous events, and which could not indeed occur again in many years—indeed, not under less than a cycle. There would be thousands upon thousands of worshippers there, and the gain would be enormous. What, indeed, were they to do with it all? "We must spend it upon poor Bramhuns, dig wells in desert places, and give marriage portions—all good works, and pleasing to the gods: what have Bramhuns to do with wealth?" said the Shastree.

"Nay; but we will have a marriage at home," thought Anunda; and from the time the alliance was shaped into form she began to hoard every rupee she could get. Never had the gardeners found her so active in coming down to Sindphul to look after the

fruit and vegetables in the garden there. Never had the sellers in the Bazar known her to be so keen after the returns of sale. As she said to herself, if there is a marriage, my lord shall have a good one.

This very plethora of wealth brought about the question with her husband. "What can we do with it?" he said one day, on receiving an unusually large gift.

"We will marry you," said the wife. "Tara and I have determined upon it in our own minds; and oh, my dear honoured husband, you are not to object! We have kept this from you as yet; but if you will agree, we have found a treasure, a jewel, such as we can give to you, and be proud and thankful to see you wear."

There was no circumlocution in the matter. Anunda, watching her opportunity, as a wife best knows how to do, had gone direct to the point, and, seconded by Tara, had smoothed away all difficulties and won the victory.

The Shastree made but one condition—that which Moro Trimmul had expected, and for which he had provided. "I care not for wealth or for beauty," he said to his wife. "We are rich—too rich; and thou, Anunda, art more beautiful than ever; but the 'birth letter' must accord; and she must be pure and high in blood."

So Anunda had told him that, as to the first, she would ask for the "birth letter," and hope it would be good; as to the second, what doubt at all? She

could vouch for good birth, as good as their own, and for wealth if that were needed.

Now, therefore, that the matter all hinged upon the fitness or otherwise of Radha's "birth letter," and the last link in Anunda's chain was to be completed or for ever broken, it may be conceived that she awaited her husband's decision on the subject with much anxiety. He had requested not to be disturbed while he made the examination. So Anunda and Tara waited within. The outer door of the court had been fastened as well as that of the school, and he was, as we found him at the beginning of this chapter, alone on his dais, absorbed in the contents of the document before him.

"Yes," he said again aloud, "that it is strangely coincident, there can be no doubt. Again and again I have checked these formulæ, and they are right, and the abandoned calculation leads direct into my own. Ho, Tara! Anunda!" he cried, "bring my Junum Putr, quick; I need it." And Anunda took it, and, laying it before him, did not venture to stay or to speak; but she saw by the expression of his face that he was deeply interested, and she again withdrew.

He opened it, that strange shadowing of his life which, with a fascination he could not resist, he had occasionally examined, yet without daring to pry into the future. Enough that he could follow the past as nearly as might be from the fallible nature of the science. Now, he laid both papers

together; and his eye passed from one to another rapidly, as his chest heaved and his pulses throbbed with an excitement to which he had long been a stranger, forcing from him the exclamations of wonder which we have recorded.

"Marvellous and mysterious agents in our existence," he continued, "who can withstand ye? who can refuse your directions? Here I bow before ye, O mystic fates, lead me as ye will; this happiness, aided by these heavenly indications, I dare not resist. Anunda! Tara! O wife! O child!" he continued as they entered, stretching out his hands towards them, "be it as ye will, beloved!"

That was a happy evening for the three. It was not too late to ratify the act, and then the preparations were soon made. A few lumps of sugar-candy and some spices were placed on a silver salver, and garlands of fresh flowers procured from the flower-sellers. Anunda dressed herself in one of her best suits, and Tara put on a simple new garment befitting her position. Several of the servants who had suspected the matter, poured forth their congratulations. A marriage, with all the new clothes, and feasting; oh, it would be delightful! And now the betrothal sugar was to be taken, so the matter was decided. Might they accompany the lady? Yes, they were all to come, and one was to go and prepare the lady Sukya; and so, finally, preceded by a pipe and tabor, the little procession went forth into the street.

No concealment now. As the neighbours gathered at their doors they knew why the lady Anunda and Tara went forth. Some wondered, some sneered; but the majority thought Anunda wise. The Shastree was to marry again, and there might again be a male child in the house.

The preparation by Sukya had been made, and the girl Radha, dressed by her aunt and Gunga, who was there, in a rich Saree of orange and gold, with wreaths of flowers hanging about her, had been placed on the dais in the house where they lodged. She wore heavy ornaments of gold, and Anunda felt proud of her selection for her lord, as well for Radha's great beauty as for the wealth of which she had evidence. No, she was no common girl. Here were no crowds of poor relations; even money was needless; but they would be too well bred to refuse it."

So they were. The music continued to play a merry measure suited to the ceremony. The girl's forehead was marked with the sacred colours; a fragrant paste rubbed upon her hands and arms, neck and bosom, by Anunda and Tara. Rice and other grain, emblems of fertility, sprinkled over her head, money poured into her lap, and sugar put into her mouth; while the sacred hymn and incantation from the Veda was chanted by Tara and her mother, and joined in by those who had collected around.

Then all went into the household temple of the dwelling and paid their adoration to Bhowani and

Lakshmee, and the rite was finished. Radha was the betrothed wife of Vyas Shastree.

"Mayst thou be happy, O my sister!" said Moro Trimmul, who, though present, had not interfered further than to direct the ceremonies. "Surely this is a fortunate day for us all. Now I go to the temple to lay my offerings before the Mother, and, with your permission, lady, I will visit the Shastree to-morrow. Long have I desired to know him, for the fame of his learning has gone far and wide; but who would make a stranger known to him? and surely it is providential that our houses have thus been united."

"You will be welcome, sir," said Anunda, as she rose to take her departure.

CHAPTER VI.

ANUNDA was not a person to allow useless time to elapse between the ascertained necessity of any act and its completion, and the preparation for the marriage went on merrily. What stores of flour, and rice, and ghee,* and condiments were laid in! What gorgeous dresses selected! Ah, young English ladies, and indeed I may include mothers also, who may read these pages, you are not to believe that wedding trousseaux are confined to your own country and society! Very far from it. A young Hindu lady, or Mahomedan either—there is not much to choose between them in this respect—is as full of hope of a liberal, a handsome, outfit on her marriage, as any fashionable young lady of Belgravia or Mayfair; and believe me, is as proportionably delighted if it be so.

There was much to spend, and no grudging. So one old cloth-seller had been dispatched to Sholapoor, and another to Wyrāg; one to Nuldroog also, then a large camp and emporium; and the result was, as we

* *Ghee*—boiled butter.

may say, an overplus of riches. It was hard to select from the bales on bales which were sent up from the shops; still, piece by piece, the dresses accumulated, and were indeed lovely. Silk and gold sarees; silk and cotton mixed; plain cotton with silk borders; bodice pieces, stiff with gold and brocade—all betokening wealth and comfort. No milliner required here. The garments of one piece, only remarkable for their richness and diversity of colour and pattern, were such as were, and are still, worn by the better classes of society. Anunda was determined that no fault could be found with her own and Tara's selection, and certainly it was better to be on the liberal side.

Then how busy the goldsmiths were! In the Shastree's school court, half-a-dozen men, sometimes more, were to be seen sitting over pans of charcoal, blowpipe in hand, beating silver or gold on small anvils, and fashioning them into massive and quaintly beautiful ornaments. Anunda had given some of her old things to be broken up and remade. We will not say how many ounces of virgin gold were added, but here too the good lady was liberal—very liberal; and Tara, of her own accord, had added from her own store some valuable jewels. Yes, the arrangements for the marriage were to be pushed on; it must be completed within a month, for after that, there was a "gutt" or planetary conjunction averse to marriage, which was to last long. As yet the day had not been fixed, but it must

soon be; and the Shastree was passive when it was mentioned. Not so those with whom he had now irrevocably connected himself.

On the other side, preparations had been as active, though simpler. Moro Trimmul's object was haste, and he had desired his aunt and sister to spare nothing within their means. Strangers as they were in the town, they found the girl Gunga, with whom, since the ceremony at the temple, Sukya Bye had become intimate, a very useful ally. She knew what Anunda was preparing. Her gossips—the flower-sellers, the cloth-merchants, and the goldsmiths—detailed all that was being done, and to aunt and niece they were amply satisfactory. They knew the Shastree was wealthy, but the profusion they heard of surprised them.

"The Shastree loves thee, girl," the lady Sukya would say. "He will spend his wealth on thee. What lucky chance brought us here, who can tell? else who would have cared for thee? To whom could we have given thee? Be content; he is not old; he will love thee, for thou art beautiful. Wait and see."

Truly she was so! Not Tara's tranquil, pensive beauty; not Anunda's even in her prime. This girl was very different from both. She was darker than either—a warm, richly-tinted, clear, golden brown, with a skin like velvet; a small head, oval face—perhaps more round than oval—and a mass of thick wavy hair, which, if loosened, fell far below her waist,

curling at the ends; a low broad forehead, strongly marked arched eyebrows, and a nose straight and delicate in outline, were perhaps the ordinary possessions of a good-looking, well-bred Mahratta girl; but the eyes and mouth were more remarkable, because they gave an index to her character.

"We will not tell what she is like," Anunda said, as her husband frequently asked her of Radha, for as yet he had not seen her. Perhaps he was indifferent on the subject, yet hardly so; it would have been unnatural not to care at all. Certainly, as the days passed, the Shastree grew somewhat curious, and he had to wait many more ere he should see her.

"Content thyself, husband," Anunda would say, as he questioned her; "I have told thee she is beautiful, else I had not noticed her: she hath a shape like a nymph, eyes like a deer, and a mouth like that of Kāmdeo.* What need to say more? Wait and see." So the Shastree waited patiently. Another would have followed the girl—contrived to see her by some means not perhaps over scrupulously; but the Shastree was very honourable, and such an alternative did not even suggest itself to him.

But they were right. What Anunda had noticed, and Tara too, were only the eyes and mouth and the figure. Who could pass them by unheeded? Such eyes—so large, so soft in their velvet blackness when at rest, yet, if excited, how different! The long, thick lashes, which were positively heavy in char-

* The Indian Cupid.

acter, shaded them ordinarily, and produced a soft, dreamy effect; but if the girl looked up, or was interested, or suddenly roused, these eyes seemed to glow internally, and to assume a character almost oppressively fascinating.

Radha well knew their power: since she was a child she had been told of the beauty of her eyes, and she believed it—nay, added to their expression by slightly staining the inner portion of her eyelids, which gave to the already heavy lashes a softer character if the eyes were at rest, or increased their effect if they were excited. Lately a habit had grown upon her of contracting her brows, and dilating her eyes till their effect was almost fierce, which both her brother and aunt had tried to check, but it did not leave her easily. Sometimes it gave place to a look of dreamy languor inexpressibly touching, and so sorrowful in character that, had the girl been older, it might have been attributed to some great grief lying at her heart, or some painful recollection. As it was, it was unsuspected, except by those who knew the cause.

The mouth followed the eyes. When they were excited by any emotion, the lips at once closed and were firmly compressed; but ordinarily they remained a little open in the centre, showing teeth white, pure, and glistening with a pearly lustre. The lips were full, red, and moist — the upper deeply arched and curved, with the corners falling back into deep dimples; yet the mouth was

small and delicate, pouting, and decidedly voluptuous when at rest or smiling, yet capable of being hardened into an expression of self-will and obstinacy, which indicated an inflexible determination should there be occasion to exercise it. No wonder that, seeing her in her most placable moods—for the girl from the first had appeared charmed by the prospect of her marriage—Anunda and Tara had been captivated by beauty so remarkable. It would have been well, perhaps, could they have seen the face under other expressions, and so been saved from what, under different circumstances, had an irresistible fascination.

Need her figure be described? Being younger than Tara, there was not the same development of form. The arms and throat were less rounded, yet the lines were as graceful and full of promise of perfection as hers. Eventually they would be about the same height—Radha, perhaps, a shade taller, and both slighter than Anunda ever had been. Her hands and feet were small and beautifully formed, more so, perhaps, than Tara's; they were, indeed, remarkable features in her figure—so much so that, as Tara was bathing her one day, and washing them, she had held them to her lips and kissed them in succession involuntarily.

It was difficult to tell her age. Her "birth letter" told the Shastree she was not yet twelve. Had she exceeded much that age, to their knowledge, Anunda would have objected to the marriage; indeed,

she could not have been married at all. But she was in reality fourteen, nay more. Sometimes, when her features relaxed, her eyes soft and dreamy, her mouth smiling, and her whole face assuming a loving tenderness of expression, she appeared hardly the age she was said to be; but when there was any change, and the rigid look already noticed took its place, she appeared considerably older.

Now, Anunda was by no means desirous of a very young girl for her husband's new wife. Many had been offered of very tender age indeed, whom she had invariably declined. She could not be troubled with a child; and if a thought that Radha might be older than she was represented to be, ever crossed her mind, a bright smile, a tender caress from the girl at once removed the doubt, and restored confidence. As to her figure, it did but furnish earnest of mature development. And were not many girls precocious? She had been so herself. Yes, Radha was very beautiful; and, as day after day passed, Anunda longed the more for the time when she should be able to clothe her in one of those gorgeous dresses, to deck her with flowers and jewels, and to present her to her husband a bride worthy of him—worthy of her own affection—the most precious gift she could make to him.

We have said that Radha was older than she was represented—and perhaps a brief sketch of her previous history is needful. She had been an indulged and precocious child, of a vain, weak, but beautiful

mother. Her father, one of the hereditary Josees, or astrologers, of Wye, had died some years before, and her mother shortly after him. Moro Trimmul, on succeeding to the care of the house, had given charge of his sister to his aunt, and betaken himself to the company of certain wild associates, with whom, from his powers of learning, he had become an especial favourite. The head of these was the Rajah Sivaji, whose rapid career to independence was one of the remarkable events of the times; and the wild exploits of the young prince, his raids against the Moguls and Mahomedans in general, had long since enlisted the sympathies of the Mahratta people.

Sivaji's early career had been dissolute, but that was a venial fault among the people. His companions were the young Mahratta gentry, — yeomen, and farmers, whom he best loved to draw about him; above all, young Bramhuns who would join him, whether as priests or soldiers, or both, in his wild enterprises. Moro Trimmul was one of these—one who had grown into his deepest confidence. So long as Moro's father lived, he had in some degree restrained his son; but his private meetings with his prince were still frequent; and in the plays and recitations, of which Sivaji was passionately fond, Moro was generally an actor and reciter. Thus it was that Sivaji frequently came to Wye, and put up at the Josee's house; and so he came to know Radha — a beautiful child then, whom he could

caress without hindrance. He a Mahratta, she a Bramhun—any union was impossible; and yet she grew to be more than interesting to him as she advanced in age.

Eventually Radha's betrothed husband died. Other offers were made for her, but were always refused, so peremptorily, that people believed the report designedly set afoot by her brother and Sukya Bye, that she was to be married to a distant relative who, now absent on pilgrimages, would return and claim her, or she would have to be taken to him. And so the girl grew, the time for marriage passed, and the Rajah's visits, often clandestine, were encouraged by aunt and nephew, with what ultimate hope of result might be imagined. Yet both were careful there should be no scandal.

Perhaps their scheme might have succeeded had not Sivaji himself, now feeling his way to power, seen the peril of the connection. Was she wife or widow, there might have been fewer scruples, but an unmarried Bramhun girl would be a burden, a disgrace, which he dared not encounter—one that would not fail to be resented by the priests, whom it was his aim to gain. He could not spare one so devoted, so able, and so unscrupulous as Moro Trimmul, nor could he replace him: he needed many such, and he loved him too much to break with him on this point.

It was a hard struggle. But the young prince, whose firm will and self-control finally won him a kingdom, successfully resisted the opportunities deli-

berately offered. As the girl grew, as his intercourse with the house became more and more unreserved, it was clear to him that her love for him was growing as part of her existence. The girl, for whom he had always a kind word and free greeting, who claimed the privilege of serving "her Rajah," when he put up at their house, became by degrees shy and reserved; cried if he spoke kindly to her, and trembled if he approached her. He could not be mistaken in those eyes: they told their own story—love.

Under such circumstances, among such people, love is passion. It has no medium except in maturer age and constant association. The girl—still a child in years—loved deeply, passionately; and as she grew older, month by month, day by day, the news of her prince's exploits, now beginning to be sung in ballads through the country, excited her fearfully. Her aunt and brother had detected her in more than one attempt to escape to him, and, fearful of the result, had prevented it. Had he taken her away, would they have pursued? Surely not; but he was careful—he admitted his own danger to himself—and he gradually avoided the house, though he clung the more closely to Moro Trimmul. Radha found means to send occasional messages to him—a child's love, a child's yearning for him were told to him; and we know that, in some instances, a child's love—there and here the same—is more passionate, because more pure and more absorbing, than a woman's. What was marriage to her? If she could

only be with her Rajah—to serve him, to live with him, to ride, nay, to fight with him — she would go, or die.

The last time Sivaji had seen her she had grown desperate. She had never spoken so to him before; but she had told him she must die if he did not take her away. "Nay, but I will come with thee," she cried, "even if thou cast me out among thy servants." And he confided this to her brother. "For my sake," he said, impressively, "if not for thine and hers, keep her safe; take her away and have her married; the farther away from hence the better. It is no use speaking to her. Moro Trimmul! save me from the temptation, thyself from the contumely this would bring upon us. I know what is in thy heart; but, beautiful as she is, it cannot be."

So a plan was quickly arranged between them. Moro had an intimate acquaintance with the Mahratta gentry of the Dekhan, and he was despatched to canvass them. This necessitated journeys from place to place. He was well provided with money, and he travelled, as one under vows of pilgrimage, to different shrines. Thus opportunity might occur for marrying Radha; and, leaving all servants behind him but a few men in whom he had perfect confidence, he took his aunt Sukya Bye with him as protection to his sister. No one cared to inquire who the young prince's envoy and counsellor was, or what his family affairs were. Enough that he had a sister and an aunt with him, and was con-

ducting his secret mission with admirable policy and address.

Thus he at length arrived at Tooljapoor alone. The rainy season had set in, and travelling was no longer pleasant or easy. The town was a good position for his purpose, and there were many rich families and landholders in the "Bala Ghaut" province to be brought over. For a time he secluded himself, and lived humbly in a hired lodging or in one of the courts of the temple. Here he had seen Gunga, and here also he daily watched Tara as she and her mother performed their worship. Even thus early the advantage of marrying his sister to the Shastree, of whose household circumstances Gunga had told him, had appeared most desirable; but as his passion for Tara grew, it was a thing to be accomplished at all hazards. Gunga did not appear able to help him, for it was clear that neither the Shastree nor his wife noticed the inferior priestesses of her class, and Tara never spoke to them. He therefore secured a good house for some months, and sent for his aunt and Radha from Punderpoor, where he had left them: and, till their arrival, had busied himself in obtaining local information for the furtherance of his future designs.

On leaving their home at Wye, and after Radha's first paroxysms of disappointment were past, Sukya Bye and Moro Trimmul had instructed the girl what to do. Perhaps, in despair of accomplishing her ends, or with the desire of all Hindu girls for an early

settlement, she was an apt scholar. Radha was to deny all knowledge of her age, to assume a childish deameanour, to acquiesce modestly, and as she saw other girls do, if she were proposed for. She was assured she would be given to none but a man of wealth—her beauty would secure her this. If possible he should be young; but this was a difficult point, and what matter if he were old? She could have jewels, rich clothes, an establishment of her own —she would have all these secured to her, and afterwards would be her own mistress.

But if she refused, or opposed these efforts in her behalf, she would soon be too old to be assisted at all. As it was, few would believe her to be within the marriageable period for Bramhun girls. In a year, nay less, her marriage would be impossible, and she must be treated like a widow, shaven and degraded, or married to a dagger,* and turned into a temple to shift for herself.

Was it wonderful that the girl submitted to, nay, even assisted in, their deceptions, or that those eyes looked dreamily after her own prince, while her spirit, chafing within, carried her, in those moments of abstraction, away into his glorious mountains, to be loved and caressed as she felt he, and he only, could love and caress her if she were with him?

* Female devotees are married to a sword or dagger, as emblematical of union to the divinity to which they have been devoted.

CHAPTER VII.

After preparations for the Shastree's marriage had been actively commenced on both sides, there was no further hindrance. Moro Trimmul having been made known to the Shastree by Anunda, as she had promised, the two men soon found a day in the calendar, so far unexceptionable as regarded planetary influences, that they at once fixed upon it; and the ladies, having been consulted, declared there were no objections or hindrances now, for on both sides of the houses everything was prepared.

Meanwhile his new acquaintance was a delightful addition to Vyas Shastree's circle of friends. Who more accomplished for his age than Moro Trimmul, more fascinating in manner, or astute in argument and judgment? He had not the refined beauty of his sister, except that his eyes were, like hers, large, soft, and very black, with the same habit of dilation, relaxing into an almost womanish tenderness: but when aroused, their excited expression was infinitely more fierce than Radha's, even to savage cruelty. The mouth was always coarse and sensual, but there

was at least good-humour about it if he were not angered, and a strength of character in the countenance which could not be mistaken. Now, nothing occurred to cause even a passing cloud, and the days which intervened between the betrothal and the marriage were pleasantly spent by all. Even Radha was interested, and clung more closely to Tara than ever; for with Anunda, as with her aunt, she preserved the habitual reserve and respect required by their positions.

"I will go to the temple, daughter," said Anunda one evening, "and keep thy father there. Do thou bring Radha here, and let her look at the dresses and jewels: if there is anything she wants in addition, tell me, and we will get it." The good lady could not do too much.

Kind Anunda! it was so considerate. Could any doubt of her ultimate happiness remain in the girl's heart? What other "sister wife" would have cared so for her?

Oh, the girl's delight at those gorgeous clothes and jewels! She had heard of splendid gifts at marriages, and there was one at Wye in which she had helped to deck the bride; and when she had seen her—she was but a mere child—dressed in a brocade garment stiff with gold, she had wondered whether it would ever be possible to possess one like it. There were several—green and gold, crimson and gold, purple and gold. The most glossy of Pyetun silks, soft muslin sarees from Narrainpett and Dhunwar, of

which she had heard, but had never seen; they did not come to her country: all were beautiful.

Then the ornaments. There were massive gold chain anklets, with small bells to them, armlets, bracelets, ear-rings, necklaces. There was the sacred "talee," which would be tied round her neck. Tara showed them all as they were laid out in cotton upon a tray covered with red muslin. How beautiful they were! and all would belong to her; they would be put on her the day of the ceremony, and her own taken off as she entered the house. Then the place where she was to be bathed and dressed, was newly coloured and plastered, and the comfort of the house and its pretty decorations—all satisfied the girl's longing. It was what she had pictured to herself; and Tara said her father was kind, so kind—he would love his little wife after his quiet fashion, and deny her nothing.

So it was not to be wondered at if any repugnance which she had felt was fast passing away, and if, when her brother asked her whether she would be content, she told him she was grateful for what he had done; and for the time perhaps she was so.

Sukya Bye had told her nephew of Radha's visit to the Shastree's house by stealth with Tara: she was afraid he might hear of it otherwise, perhaps through the servants or Gunga, and was rejoiced that he considered it a happy circumstance. "She will be satisfied with the wealth," he said, "and all that she sees will excite the desire for more, and so, aunt, we

shall best hold her to our purposes. She cannot recede now; and, while moulding the Shastree to her will, by-and-by she need not forget Sivaji Rajah." But he did not tell this to Radha; and neither by her brother, nor Sukya Bye, was any reference made to the past. When all was beyond chance of disturbance, he would set her to work to compass his own ends.

The Shastree and Pundit were of different schools of philosophy; the former, as we know, belonged to the ancient, and, as he considered, orthodox, Vedantic school of Veda Vasa; the Pundit to the more modern Mimansa school of Jomiai, and to the doctrines and mythological histories of the Poorans. So they had discussions, in which other Bramhuns of the town joined, while the ladies sat behind a screen and heard their disputations, and Tara explained to them what she could follow. Or the friends played at chess, both having excellent skill;— the Shastree calm and steady, the Pundit fiery and impetuous, as were their natures; and so they had many an earnest battle.

It was not long before the politics which then agitated the country began to be discussed between them. They lived under the same Mahomedan government, that of Beejapoor: but while Tooljapoor and the districts around it were as yet in entire subjection, those to the west—particularly the wild rugged country beyond Wye, the Mawuls or mountain-valleys of the Ghauts, stretching into the Dekhan—owed but a slight

allegiance to the Mahomedan dynasty, and perhaps had never been completely subdued. Here it was that many of the oldest Mahratta families had taken refuge after the overthrow of the Hindu dynasty of Deogurh, the modern Dowlutabad, and the subsequent subjection of the country by the Mahomedan Emperors of Delhi; and it was among these families, the Bhoslays, Nimbalkurs, Morays, Ghoreparays, and others, that the germs of that combination to resist —to them an oppressive and corrupt government— existed, which was presently to be ripened into a successful revolution.

On the other hand, this dynasty of Beejapoor had already been attacked by the immense power of the Emperors of Delhi; and while the independent kingdom of Ahmednugger — itself at one period little inferior in splendour to that of Beejapoor—had been entirely subdued, and the princes of its house annihilated by the Moguls, any combination to resist them by the two states had not only been rendered impossible, but it was clear that Beejapoor would follow its example: and those were not wanting who hoped, under a new power, to regain many privileges which hitherto had been withheld from them.

But it was in the antagonism of the two contending Mahomedan powers that the Hindu families of the Dekhan saw the means of emancipation from both. It might be a work of time, and of immense labour and skill: but the opportunity seemed to pre-

sent itself; and while feigning submission alike to the Moguls, as, after the conquest of Ahmednugger their forces were poured into the provinces which had formed that kingdom, and, on the other hand, to the older-established dynasty of Beejapoor, a stirring spirit began to be aroused among the Mahrattas; and that secret combination silently progressed, of which Moro Pundit was one among many other agents employed by Sivaji, the prince to whom all now looked as the present head, if not the instigator, of the movement.

It had, in fact, already been some time covertly in progress. Shahji Bhoslay, the father of Sivaji, had commenced it in a series of wild irregular forays and raids from his patrimonial estate, which was situated among the Mawuls west of Poona, against the Mahomedan posts and garrisons of the western provinces of Beejapoor. For a time he was successful, but only as a mere freebooter; and in the end he was defeated, taken prisoner, and confined in a dungeon in Beejapoor for several years by the monarch Mahmood Adil Shah, the father of the king reigning at Beejapoor at the period of our tale. But Mahmood was not implacable. On the intercession of his mother, by whose wise counsels he had often been guided, Shahji was not only released but raised to a high command, and during the subsequent invasion of Beejapoor by the Moguls did good service, and so the progress of the Mahratta power was stayed.

Of his two sons Sivaji early took the lead, and, encouraged by his mother, a lady of high family and ambition, and admirable judgment, he aspired to be the head of a Mahratta confederacy. What progress he eventually made is already matter of history, which will have no record in these pages; but at the time of which we write, he was strengthening himself in his own wild country, collecting adherents, canvassing those who still held aloof, fortifying rugged and inaccessible strongholds, and, by the suddenness, and successful issue of his continuous forays, was rendering himself famous in the eyes of the people. While he treated with both of the rival Mahomedan powers by turns, he took his own course; and yielding alternately to each whenever their force was locally in excess of his own, was in reality faithful to neither.

To Sivaji, also, belonged the prestige which none else had dared to assume—that of receiving aid from heavenly powers. The goddess Bhowani was the tutelar deity of his family; and it was the popular belief that she had chosen his father as the champion of her faith, but that he had transgressed warnings and visions, and, implacable as she was believed to be, she had cast him off. It was otherwise, however, with his second son Sivaji. She had chosen him to be the scourge of the cow-slaying, impure, and licentious Mahomedans. The cries of her votaries had arisen to her, and the land was to be purged of uncleanness. Temples would be again filled with Bram-

huns, and the sweet incense of pure sacrifice would ascend to her. The mother of Sivaji, it was reported, saw and recorded visions, too glorious to relate, in which her son was a victorious conqueror, and the infidel Mahomedans were slain in tens of thousands by the Mahratta people in those great battles which were to ensue. And these visions were believed.

As yet these prophecies were circulated privately among the people, but there was not a Mahratta, far or near, who did not know of them. Ballads were written about them, and sung at fairs and markets. Women composed and chanted extempore verses as the household mills flew merrily round in the early morning. Men sang them to their oxen as they ploughed, or drew water from their wells; and so a spirit spread through the people which eventually became irresistibly powerful.

In this excitement, too, existed the incentive to the worship of Bhowani at all her most celebrated shrines; and everywhere—to gather her votaries together, to excite them to action, and to warn them to be ready when the time arrived—were agents such as Moro Trimmul, despatched by the young chieftain. Nothing appeared on the surface. Experience had taught extreme caution. There were no assemblies of armed men, no displays of force: an occasional successful raid or resistance by Sivaji kept up what might well be called the national spirit; but all delayed to strike, till, in the ex-

pressive Mahratta phrase, "the fire was on the hills."*

Very dexterously, therefore, and after having prepared him for the communication, did Moro Trimmul confide to the Shastree some of the popularly-reported plans of his friend and prince, and sought his counsel and assistance, and partly also the purport of his own mission. He asked information as to the families of the Bala Ghaut, the Nimbalkurs of Wasi, the Kallays of Nelinga, the Bhoslays and Ghoreparays of Akalkote, all neighbours; and also respecting the wealthy yeomen and farmers of the country. He did not mention Pahar Singh, with whom, through the Gosaees of Kullianee, and their agency at Tooljapoor, he had already opened negotiations, and found the robber chieftain fickle and undecided, extravagant in his demands for estates, for high command, and other rewards.

Nor did he disclose that weightier secret, known to his prince and himself, on which, for the present, the success of their enterprise rested. Khan Mahomed, the Wuzeer or Prime Minister, of Beejapoor, might be detached, it was said, from the royal interest of his house; and he was then, with a large army, lying at and about Nuldroog, little more than twenty miles distant from Tooljapoor. To this man, at his own request, in phrases only to be interpreted by himself, a letter had been forwarded through the Gosaee banker's agent at Tooljapoor; but no reply had been

* Dônguras, lavilé Déva.

received. Nor was Moro Trimmul sanguine on the subject, for reports of the Wuzeer's intrigues in other quarters were in men's mouths. No; it was from the Mahratta families alone that he had expectations; and he knew that, at the ensuing festival, all or most of the province would assemble at Tooljapoor.

To say that he found a zealous coadjutor, or hoped for one, in the Shastree, would not be correct. The Shastree was not ambitious. He enjoyed already, as we know, a very lucrative and prominent position, in which he was honoured and respected. He avoided all Mahomedans upon principle; but the governors of the province often sought his advice and assistance in civil and judicial matters regarding Hindus, and he was not only never molested, but, on the contrary, respected and treated with consideration, and had even been invited to court. He had, therefore, no quarrel with the Mahomedans, and he well knew their power. He had watched Shahji's failures, and he had noted the effect of Sivaji's efforts; still he admitted there was more chance of success now than before; and he agreed to assist Moro Trimmul, by bringing him into communication with the gentry of the province, provided he were not required to take any prominent part in what should follow. To say that Vyas Shastree was indifferent in this matter, would be incorrect; but to anticipate enthusiasm or personal zeal, would have been impossible from his character, and Moro Trimmul did not expect them.

"After the ceremony," he said to the Shastree, "Radha, of course, will remain with you. Sukya Bye will return to Wye with the servants. Give me, then, letters to the Nimbalkurs of Wasi, and to such others as you please, and I will go alone. Introduce me as a reciter of plays, and I will make my own way unnoticed and unsuspected. Here I can be of no use, and may even attract suspicion."

To this plan Vyas Shastree gave his cordial consent. Moro Trimmul would go before the Now Ratree, and return for the festival.

CHAPTER VIII.

I AM afraid it would take more time than the limits of this history will afford, were I to describe minutely all the festivities and observances of Radha's marriage. I assure you, dear readers, that a proper, orthodox Hindu marriage, is a very tiresome affair; and, like many other marriages, perhaps, everybody is glad when it is over. Very noisy, tediously minute in ceremonial, liable to interruption from disputes—it is often an arena for rival factions of families to fight out all the ill feeling, discontent, and jealousy which have accumulated for years. Sometimes the feasts provided are not eaten, and have to be thrown away or given to beggars. Musicians won't play, processions can't be formed, or are interrupted in progress: offence is taken at trifles, and the whole proceeding rocks to and fro as though it would tumble to pieces altogether, till it suddenly comes right, and affairs go on—to a happy conclusion or otherwise, as it may be.

When all prospers, it is a right merry affair; but I

am afraid you, dear young lady, would be very weary if you had to be married as Radha was. No such thing as going to church comfortably in a luxurious carriage, to be attended to the altar by six loving and lovely bridesmaids, to hear there a short, simple, affecting service and blessing, to sign your maiden name for the last time in the vestry, and to go home, having dried your eyes on the most delicate of lace-bordered cambric pocket-handkerchiefs, to a champagne breakfast, all the delicacies of the season, a carriage and four, and—unlimited bliss in prospect.

Ah, no! with Radha it was very different. Her marriage ceremonies—will you believe it?—occupied ten days of really very hard work. So many dressings and undressings; so many bathings; so many anointings; so many changes of ornaments; such smotherings in flowers, in large sheets, lest her husband should see her; such being carried from place to place by the servants, lest her feet might touch the ground—once too by her husband, whom she could feel, but not see; and a rare strong arm and hand his was, taking her up, she felt, as if she were a child, and gently and respectfully too. Then worshippings at the great Temple, where she had never been before, and where the priests put flowers on her and led her into the shrine where "the little Mother" sat, with her weird red eyes looking through the smoke, and Radha was half-frightened by them; greetings, too, from the people with whom the marriage was popular; and the flower-sellers and comfit-

makers poured baskets of their stocks over her and her decorated litter, while she looked curiously about her from under the veil of jessamine flowers which covered her face, and acknowledged with shy timid gestures their hearty salutations. No doubt a great deal of this was excellent fun, and the girl's spirits rose with the genial joyousness; but at times she was very weary.

Seldom had there been a merrier wedding. What jokes were played off by her brother, who was a capital hand, as we know, at acting plays, disguising himself, and personating characters, with which he mercilessly interrupted the orthodox ceremonies. Now a Mahomedan mendicant, whose intrusion was resisted by the servants, and whose presence had polluted the food, proved to be he; or the pipers' instruments were filled with wax, and they blew discordant screeches, or could not blow at all; or a pertinacious begging Bramhun or Byragee pestered them when most engaged, insisted on seeing the bride, or threatened, otherwise, to cut himself and bring trouble on her. Now one thing, now another; teasing his sister, playing a sly joke with Anunda, tormenting the Shastree in all manner of ways, he was the life of the meeting, and always so disguised as to dress, figure, and even voice, that no one recognised him.

Then were there not all the pipers of the country? the temple musicians, and drums of all kinds, tenor and bass? Such crashes of noise! Village bands, the

temple musicians, and the hired performers, and dancing women, all playing different tunes at the same moment. The horn-players and drums of half the country came in hopes of largess; and there was one burly fellow from Andoora, near Nuldroog, whose horn had wreaths of flowers tied to it, with gold and silver tinsel ribbon, the wild screams of whose instrument, and sometimes its mellow quivering notes, could be heard high above all the others.

And, to be sure, what feasting! The household cooking-pans were not half big enough, and those from the temple had to be borrowed: and the neighbours' kitchens, on both sides, were filled with cooks. Pecks and bushels of rice, butter, vegetable stews, and curries; sweet things, hot things, savoury things; and Anunda's famous "poorees,"* reserved for the choicest guests—some even made by herself and Tara.

There was no room in the house or in the courts for eating, so the street outside was swept and watered; and every day, early in the afternoon, you might see a posse of stout young Bramhuns laying down green fresh plantain-leaves in double rows on the ground, with broad alleys between them, and then long files of clean-shaven Bramhuns sit down behind them; and after them a procession of men bearing on their shoulders huge pans full of rice, hot from the kitchen, and slung on poles—baskets of hot bread, poorees, curries, stews, and the like, would march

* A kind of soft pancake, much relished at feasts.

down the middle, ladling out portions of all to each, and helping liberally to melted butter, hot "chutnees," and other toothsome condiments.

And the men ate and ate till they could eat no more, and the crowds on the house-terraces above them watched the eating, cheered the eaters, and bandied free jokes from side to side of the street at themselves, the eaters, the carriers of the viands, or the passengers. So they ate and ate by hundreds and hundreds at a time; and many a hungry Bramhun, hardly knowing how to get a meal of coarse jowaree cakes in his own home, took his water-vessel and blanket, travelled from twenty to thirty miles round to the wedding, received a hearty welcome, and ate as he had perhaps never eaten before, and remembered it all his life afterwards.

Yes, it was a capital wedding; and the village and town gossips who criticised it at the time, and spoke of it afterwards, could actually find no fault. There was not a poor old hag in Tooljapoor or Sindphul, ay, and for the matter of that, in other villages further distant, who did not get a hearty meal; or if she were too infirm to stay and eat, a liberal dole of flour, or rice and butter, with salt and pepper. Not a family of Mahrattas in the town, nor, indeed, respectable Mahomedans either, who had not materials for a meal sent to them, accompanied by pipe and tabor, horn and drum, or band and trumpets, according to the scale of their rank. And from all friends, presents for the bride, in proportion to their means,

from the richest silken and gold sarees,* down to a humble cotton bodice, added to the stores with which Radha was already provided.

One by one the ceremonies were finished. The last—the solemn rite of actual marriage—as the bride and bridegroom sat side by side, when the consecrated thread was wound round them by the attendant Bramhuns, and the mystic hymns and invocations chanted; when their garments were tied together in the irrevocable knot, and they repeated the promises and vows, much like our own, to love and cherish each other — then Radha's veil was raised; and though he had seen her form for many days in succession, Vyas Shastree now saw his young wife's beautiful face for the first time.

It was a happy look, in one of her happy moods. Those glorious eyes were not excited, but soft, timid, and shyly raised to him in trust and confidence. Anunda and Tara had watched for the effect upon him with beating hearts and clasped hands. There could be no doubt of the expression of his face—wonder first, then gratification, perhaps love. "Thou wast right, wife," he said afterwards; "she hath a nymph's form, a deer's eyes, and a mouth like Kāmdeo."

So it was all finished at last; the guests departed, the courts were swept, and the house again cleaned out. The garlands of leaves and flowers still hung at the gate, and from pillar to pillar of the verandah;

* *Sarees*—women's garments in one piece, generally about eight yards long.

and certain post-nuptial ceremonies performed at the temple was all that remained of the outer show of the marriage. Within was the girl-bride, happy in being free from her brother, whom she feared though she loved him, and from her aunt, whom she disliked as well as feared; happy in her new sister-wife, to whom she felt like a daughter; happier in Tara, a sister in truth, and she never had known one before; content, too, to see the Shastree unreservedly, and to feel that her beauty grew on him—for as yet, beyond a few words, they had not spoken.

As Moro Trimmul had determined, Sukya Bye was despatched to their home a few days after the ceremony. She had pleaded hard to be allowed to stay over the Now Ratree, and Anunda had asked the favour at her instance; but her nephew was distinct in his refusal, yet not so as to display anger or vexation. It was simply impossible, he said; she had been too long absent from home, and he himself must go on his own affairs. So she received parting gifts of rich silk cloths from Radha, Anunda, and the Shastree, and departed to Wye.

. . . . . .

The last night that Moro Trimmul was to remain at Tooljapoor, he took an opportunity of telling Radha that he should pretend to go out, but conceal himself in the school court, which was not lighted, and that she was to come to him when all were asleep or retired; he should wait for her there, for he had much to say to her.

So he had. How he had restrained himself hitherto he knew not. How, day by day, he had seen Tara, spoken to her, amused her, excited her, gloated over her beauty, which, if remarkable abroad where she was guarded, was in a thousand degrees more captivating and enthralling in the free household intercourse—and yet had done nothing towards possessing himself of her—was what he could neither understand nor endure any longer. Gunga could not help him; he saw clearly that Tara utterly refused communication with her: utterly refused to participate in the lower degrees of ceremonies and orgies at which Gunga assisted with a lower order of priests who officiated for the inferior castes of the people; and she refused the mystic marriage to the sword of the goddess, which the "Moorlees" performed in order to cloak their profligacy.

Gunga, therefore, baffled for a while, bided her time; but she and her sister priestesses had vowed revenge, and were all in Moro Trimmul's interest. Meanwhile his sister must help him; and this, with cruel perseverance, it was his object to effect through her at any risk.

He waited long, for the girl could not get away unobserved. At last she came, scared and terrified lest her absence should be detected; but all were asleep—Tara beside her in the verandah, the Shastree among his books in the book-room, Anunda in her own sleeping-room within. She did not find her brother in better temper for his detention.

"Take this," he said to her, returning a gold anklet of Tara's, which Radha had borrowed from her to be copied; "for I go to-morrow early, and shall not see thee again till the Now Ratree; but thou hast kept me long, girl, and I had much to say to thee."

"The Shastree was awake reading: even till now I could not pass his door," she said; "be quick, brother."

"Ah, thou art trembling. Is this the girl who would have fled to Sivaji Rajah; and art thou changed already into a Shastree's wife?" he said, with a sneer.

The girl shivered. "Do not say such things, brother. I strive to put them away, and they will go, perhaps; yes, they will go, when no one tells me of him."

Her brother laughed. "No, they shall not go, Radha, if I can prevent it; but thou must be patient, girl. So much for thyself; now for me."

"What can I do, brother?"

"Thou canst gain Tara for me. Nay, Radha," he continued, as she trembled still more, and hung to the court door in terror, "none of this cowardice! I tell thee it must be, and thou must do it."

"Brother! brother!" gasped the girl, piteously. "Not I—not I! What can I do? O, not I! O, not I!"

"What canst thou do? Much," he returned, sharply; "listen, Radha. Such things are no sin. She is a Bramhun, as I am; she is a widow. She is a Moorlee,

as free as Gunga, or any of them, and she can please herself. I know she is not indifferent to me: it is for thee to improve this. Speak to her of me, lead her to think of me, tell her what deeds I have done with thy Rajah, sing her our country ballads—I am with him in them. I tell thee, girl, if thou doest all this, it will gain her."

"Never, brother, never; she has no heart for thee. She shuddered yesterday when I spoke of thee. I saw her—I could not be mistaken. Her heart is with the Gods, in her books, cold and dead. O brother, think not of her! What can I do?"

"Is it so, sister?" he said sneeringly. "Then she must be awakened, and that dead heart gain new life; Radha, thou must do it, thou!—else"—he felt the girl shivering as he grasped her arm, and shook her savagely—"else, wilt thou be long here? Would this Shastree keep thee one hour in his house if he thought, much less if he knew, thou hadst been married before, girl? Yes, married before! Ah, that touches thee! And listen more, if my affair is not furthered he shall know it. What if he cast thee out? Thou canst go to the temple like Tara; thou canst go to him—to Sivaji—but thou wilt be a reproach and an outcast. Choose!—to be happy as I have placed thee, or as I have said. One or other, girl: the last, and what I have risked for thee—what I have done for thee—will be repaid. O sister! what Sivaji Rajah is to thee, a burning

thought day and night, so Tara is to me, and more. Dost thou hear?"

"I—I," gasped the terrified girl, "I hear—I hear. O brother, be not cruel, do not destroy me; or, if thou wilt, one blow of thy knife—now—now—here," and she bared her breast. "It will be mercy—strike!"

"Poor fool," said Moro Trimmul, "I would not harm thee. Go, remember what I have said, and do as I tell thee. If she be in the same mood when I return, why then—— Go," he continued, interrupting himself, "I can wait no longer. Fear not, my blessing is on thee," and he put his hands on her head. "For his sake, my lord, my prince and thine, thou shalt come to no harm. Go!" And saying this he put her gently away from him into the court, closed the door, and easily climbing the low wall, dropped into the street beyond.

"One thing more ere the night passes," he said, as he walked rapidly through the deserted streets to the house they had lived in, near the Shastree's: "if she is there, well; if not, I must seek her. What she wanted must have been brought ere this."

"She is within, master," said a man sitting at the gate, with a black blanket round him, who spoke ere Moro Trimmul could ask; "she has been here an hour or more; and here are some things the sonar* brought this evening when you were absent."

* Goldsmith.

"Good," said the Pundit, passing in; "see that no one enters."

The man laughed. "It is too late, master, now. No one will come. Are we to leave early?"

"Tell them to bring the horses at daylight," he replied; "we will get on to Darasew before noon. We must be at Thair before night. Is all prepared?"

"Yes, the saddlebags are packed, and Bheema and myself remain; all the rest went with the lady Sukya."

"Then go and sleep, for we have a long journey to-morrow. I do not need thee. Give me the key of the court door. I can lock myself in, and I shall be awake long before you in the morning."

He entered the court and locked the gate behind him. A lamp was burning in a recess of the verandah, and its light fell upon the figure of the girl Gunga, who had covered herself with a sheet, and, most likely weary with waiting for him, had fallen asleep. She did not hear him; and as he had left his shoes by the side of the outer door, there was no noise whatever from his bare feet.

Moro Trimmul stood over her, and, as he did so, she moved uneasily in her sleep, turned, and said something; he could not catch the words. Then some cruel thoughts passed suddenly through his mind. Gunga knew too much; a blow of his knife would silence for ever all chance of disclosure of what had been done for Radha; the gold he had to give her would be saved. There was a large well or cistern

behind the house; the wall of the back-yard hung over it; it was a place where the women of the town washed their clothes, and was so held to be unclean. That would hide her. A Moorlee? What Moorlee had not jealousies and strifes? Who would care for her? And he drew the dagger and stood over her in an attitude to strike.

Why he hesitated he could never tell; certainly it was not from fear. Perhaps some lingering feeling of compassion for one so young—perhaps the memory of some caress—stayed the blow for an instant, for he did not strike. The light fell full on her eyes and face as she turned, and she smiled and awoke suddenly.

"I dreamed of thee, beloved," she said, stretching out her arms to him, "and thou art here—— But why the knife?" she continued, quickly sitting up, as the light gleamed on the blade. "Moro!—I—I—I fear thee; why dost thou look at me so? Ah!" and she covered her eyes with her hand, expecting death.

"Only to cut these strings," he said, with a hard laugh, recovering himself and dividing the cord which was tied round the paper containing the gold anklets. "Look, Gunga!" and he held them up to the light, and shook them till the little bells on them clashed gently.

"Thou art good," she said, looking up as he held them above her, still shaking them; "they are very, very beautiful, but thou wilt not give them to me, for thou hast not got Tara. Ah! thou hast just come from her, and wilt not give them. Go! go back to her."

"But my sister is her father's wife, and these are heavier than Tara's. I have not broken faith with thee, Gunga," he replied, "nor my oath at the Pâp-nâs temple. Take them—they are thine henceforth. And now wilt thou go with me, Gunga? I have prepared a horse for thee, and Bheema can walk."

"To the end of life," cried the girl, who had risen to her knees to put on the anklets, and who now clasped his feet,—"to the end of life! Kill me if thou wilt, Moro Trimmul, who would care? It would be no pain to Gunga."

CHAPTER IX.

A THICK heavy rain was falling, which had lasted nearly all day without intermission, and the afternoon was now advanced. The sky was one uniform tint of dark grey, in which, near the horizon, some yellowish, lurid colour occasionally appeared. Dark masses of cloud came up slowly from the south-west at times, causing a deeper gloom as they passed overhead, accompanied by bursts of rain, which sometimes fell in sheets, deluging the ground, and dashing up muddy spray from the soft earth. The air was stifling; and there was a strong sulphurous smell with the rain, which increased the disagreeable effect of the close, hot atmosphere. Sometimes a gentle breeze, hardly sufficient to give the rain a slanting direction, arose, and felt refreshing; but as the heavy clouds passed, it died away, and the rain fell perpendicularly again, with a constant monotonous plash, which, coming from a wide plain, sounded like a dull roar.

Little could be seen of the plain itself; for not only was the rain too thick to allow of any distance

to appear definitely, but there was a steamy mist rising from the previously heated earth, which increased the already existing dimness and gloom. Sometimes a few trees in the vicinity, which appeared tall and ghostly in the grey light and thick air, stood out more in detail as the rain slackened for a while, and seemed to give promise of breaking; and on these occasions two villages became dimly visible; one of them nearly a mile distant, the other perhaps half a mile farther, situated to the right and left of what, in dry weather, was a well-beaten road-track, but which could only now be known as such, by being bare of grass, and by the slightly raised banks, covered here and there by low bushes, which bounded it.

The place we are about to describe occupied the summit of a small eminence, below which, in a valley watered by a rivulet, was a village surrounded by tall crops of grain, now coming into ear, mingled with fields of cotton, as yet very low, and pulse, and other cereals, generally about waist-high. This difference in the height of the crops left the valley comparatively open; and the road-track could be followed by the eye, whenever the mist and rain cleared a little—through the fields to the gate of the first village, before which there was an open piece of ground, past a small Hindu temple surrounded with trees, and up a slight ascent beyond, to a plain, along which it continued, till it disappeared among the tall

jowary fields and other cultivation of the next village. These two villages were called the greater and less Kinny.

The valley, or hollow, was little more than a descent in the undulation of the country; but, when the rain fell heavily at the nearer village, so as almost to conceal it, the effect from the eminence we describe was, as though it were actually deep and broad; and then also the farther village, with its trees, appeared distant, and sometimes was not visible at all. Thus alternating, as sometimes plainly in view, and at others not to be seen, these villages appeared to be objects of deep interest to three men, who occupied the spot we have just mentioned. Occasionally, and as the rain cleared a little, one or other of them would proceed to the top of a heap of stones near at hand, and look anxiously along the line of road, past the fields and the open space before the gate of the first Kinny, up the ascent beyond, and over the plain to the second; and there were moments when a man on horseback might easily have been descried even at the further village, certainly at the second, or between them, had such a person been upon the road; but no one appeared.

The spot was remarkable as the highest point for a long distance either way upon the road-track; and indeed, had the day been clear, a large extent of country could have been seen from it in all directions. Now, however, the view was very limit-

ed; and on the opposite sides from the two villages nothing could be seen but a plain, thinly covered with grass and bushes, and strewn thickly with black stones, which, uncultivated as it was for miles, looked doubly desolate through the misty air, being partially covered with pools of water of a yellowish brown colour, the result of the present rain. Over this plain, three roads or paths diverged from the place the men occupied. The main track, which had the appearance of being somewhat beaten, was broader than the others, and led westward to the town of Allund, about six miles distant, —the others to villages from two to four miles to the south and west.

The plain was, as we have said, very stony, and at the place we allude to, the heap of stones had been formed gradually by travellers who, coming from all sides, took up one from the path, and threw it, with a prayer to the local divinity, upon the pile. This had been done, no doubt, for centuries; still the stones upon the paths appeared as thick as ever, and sorely impeded and harassed all travellers, whether on foot or horseback.

Over this heap of stones grew a large banian, and close to it several scraggy neem trees; a peepul, too, had once existed, but was dead. Part of the trunk and one large branch remained standing, white and dry, and a portion of another lay on the ground, from which chips of firewood had been cut from time to time. It looked as if it had been struck

with lightning, which, indeed, was not improbable, as several branches of the banian were scathed and riven, probably from the same cause. Of all these trees, however, the banian or "burr," as it is called in the language of the country, was most remarkable.

Not possessed of the luxuriant foliage common to this tree in other places, probably because the soil was too poor and rocky, its huge gnarled boughs were bare of small branches and leaves; some were naked and actually withered, others apparently so, and all stretched their white gaunt arms into the sky, with a wild and ghastly effect against the leaden grey of the clouds. In process of the centuries of its existence, several boughs had become detached from the parent trunk, and were upheld by stems which had once been pendant roots, and had struck into the ground. These portions, if anything more bare, and more gnarled and twisted than the parent tree, rose loftily into the air, and with the same effect we have already noticed.

The larger boughs and stems were full of holes, which sheltered a numerous colony of small grey tree owls, whose bright yellow eyes stared from behind large boughs, and out of crevices in the trunks, or from among the ornaments of the roof of the temple below; while they kept up a perpetual twittering, as if they conversed together, which indeed perhaps they did. On hot bright days lizards, large and small, crept out of crevices and basked in the

sun; and among them a family of huge black ones, with bright eyes and scarlet throats, which they inflated as they appeared to swell with importance. Shepherd boys believed these to be evil spirits, and if they were brave, pelted them with stones, or if otherwise ran off, as one of them issued forth and looked about curiously.

Some large holes, too, near the top of the tree, contained great horned owls, which, if attracted by any noise, sat, with stupidly-grave aspect and wide saucer-eyes, looking down upon the road—the tufts of feathers over their ears alternately erected and depressed—till they flew out with a loud hoot to look for some more undisturbed retreat. These owls, great and small, with the lizards, had the tree, for the most part, to themselves. Probably there was not enough foliage to tempt other birds to rest there; for except an occasional wandering flock of chattering parroquets, mynas, or green pigeons, none frequented it by day. By night, however, it was otherwise: for it was then the roosting-place of the vultures, eagles, and other carrion birds of the district, with whom the owls did not apparently interfere.

At the back, partly behind the parent tree and the heap of stones, was a small and evidently ancient Hindu temple, consisting of one chamber and a porch. The chamber was not much larger than sufficed to contain the image, and allow a priest to officiate before it in case of necessity, and was too low to admit of a man's standing upright. The porch,

which was supported in front by two roughly-hewn stone pillars, was somewhat larger; and the three men we have mentioned, were enabled to sit in it comfortably, protected from the rain. The doorway was narrow and low, and the inside of the chamber wasdark; but a small Phallic emblem could be seen within set upon a low altar, and a rudely-sculptured stone bull, in a sitting posture, had originally been placed before the porch facing the image. The temple, image, and bull showed that the grove had been originally dedicated to Siva, or Mahadeo, in the form of that ancient "pillar and calf" worship so fatal to the Israelites of old, and which for them possessed so strange a fascination.

The temple was deserted, and, except on the annual festival of the god, when some priest from a neighbouring village swept out the chamber, brought a light to burn before the image, poured the usual libations, and hung a few garlands of jessamine and marigold flowers over it, no one ever came with intent to worship, and the place was utterly neglected. Last year's garlands were now but dry brown leaves hanging to a cotton thread; the chamber was dirty, and strewn with dead leaves; the stone bull in front was overthrown, and lying on its side, and even in bright sunshine the place presented a melancholy, deserted appearance. Sometimes, in the heat of the day, village lads, in charge of goats and cattle, would meet there, but only in lack of other shelter from

the sun; for indeed the spot had an evil reputation, and not without reason.

It is not surprising that it was believed to be the resort of malignant spirits which love to dwell in such places, and of tricksy and mischievous sprites which inhabited the large holes in the old trunks, sharing them with the owls and lizards that lived there: vexed travellers' horses, causing them to cast shoes in the stones, or led wayfarers astray, especially at night, among the many paths over the stony plain—or bewitched cows and buffaloes, and dried up their milk. So, ofttimes, shepherds came with flowers, and poured libations of milk and curds, after a rude fashion, over a few large stones which lay among the gnarled roots of the great tree, and had been placed there as devoted to the local divinities—Fauns and Dryads—and therefore held in rude reverence; and these, on such occasions, were smeared with red or black powder in a kind of deprecatory worship.

It was not for these reasons alone that the place was dreaded; it had, from other causes, even a worse reputation. It was notorious as the place of meeting for most of the gang robberies in the country; for assemblies of parties of highway robbers, and the distribution of stolen property. Watchmen on village towers at night, sometimes saw fires twinkling about the temple, and well knew the cause of them; and shepherd boys next day found rude clay crucibles and extinguished charcoal fires in one place where the trunk was hollow at the root of the tree, and

thus knew that gold and silver had been melted there at night.

Murder, too, had been done there. On one occasion, not very long ago, several fresh corpses had been found in the old well barely concealed by leaves and bushes; and, more recently, a body found lying on the road had been dragged from line of one village boundary to another—for several boundaries of village lands diverged from that spot—to escape the king's fine, till it was eaten by vultures and hyenas, and the bones lay and bleached under the great tree for many a day, to the terror of all wayfarers. In short, the place was thus esteemed evil for many reasons; and whether villagers or travellers came past it by any of the roads over the plain, or from the two Kinnys, alone or in company, they hurried past the temple, breathing a spell or prayer against the ghosts and spirits which dwelt in it, and heartily wishing themselves safe beyond its precincts.

CHAPTER X.

The three persons who were sheltering themselves in the porch of the temple had apparently no apprehensions. Each in turn, throwing a coarse black blanket about him, mounted the heap of stones and looked eagerly toward the villages and along the line of road. The others sat together, rolling up leaves of the banian tree from time to time, which they filled with tobacco from their pouches, and smoked as fast as made. All three were heavily armed with long straight swords with solid basket-handles, from which a spike projected below the hilt, enabling the wearer to use his weapon double-handed, as well as to protect the wrist; shields of stout hide, with brass bosses, hung at their backs, and daggers of different forms were in their girdles. In the chamber of the temple their three matchlocks leaned against the wall—two being ordinary ones with long bright barrels, the other short and handsomely inlaid with gold, evidently of superior value to the others. The men wore their large crooked powder-horns, and bullet-bags, with tinder-boxes, at-

tached to soft leather waistbelts, and their priming-horns, hung to the breast-buckles of their sword-belts, of buff leather. The matchlocks were ready for instant use; for the matches were lighted, and the smoke, from the match-ends, and that of a small fire made of dried twigs, filled the chamber and issued from the door.

The two men who were sitting in the porch—one had just gone and taken post again upon the stones—were stout square-built fellows, of dark-brown complexion, with peculiarly round powerful shoulders, which gave them almost the appearance of deformity. They wore coarse cotton tunics and tight drawers, which reached to the knee, leaving the lower part of the legs bare, and showing them to be sinewy and well exercised by constant travel. They had not removed their sandals, which were strong and studded with large-headed nails, and, as they sat together, the resemblance in figure was very striking. They were, in fact, twin-brothers, and, being Mahrattas, had been named, as is usual, Rama and Lukshmun, after the popular heroes of the Mahabarut. Even in features there was a strong resemblance; but the expression of the elder, Rama, was as gloomy, if not savage, as that of the younger Lukshmun was cheerful and good-natured.

The brothers had been long silent, and the third person, who, with a heavy black blanket thrown over his head, had been sitting for some time upon the stones, got up and returned to the porch as a fresh

cloud passed overhead, accompanied by heavier rain than before, which gradually shut out the village and road from his view, shook the wet from the blanket, and stood looking gloomily at the sky and the torrents of water which were running off the ground towards the declivity of the eminence. There was a great contrast between this person and the others in every respect, and he merits, perhaps, a separate description.

Though young, he was evidently the leader of the party, and his comparatively fair complexion and regular features, as well as the caste-mark on his forehead, showed him to be a Rajpoot, descended from those emigrants from Northern India whom military service, even at that period, had tempted from Oude and Delhi to the remote Dekhan. In stature, as in powerful make, he much exceeded his companions, and his carriage was soldierlike and graceful. He wore a quilted tunic of what had once been gay red "mushroo," the strong satin of the country, but now stained and frayed; long tight drawers, turned up to the calf; a dark red turban, of fine texture, jauntily cocked aside, its gold thread end being turned back over the top; and his powder-horn, bullet-bag, and shield, as well as a little gold embroidery upon his sword-belt, all of a better quality than the others, with a fine single pearl ear-ring—proved him to be as much superior to them in rank, as his expression and deportment were in intelligence.

Gopal Singh, for such was his name, was, in truth, decidedly good-looking. Large black eyes, full of

light, a prominent nose, bushy whiskers, very neatly trimmed, and a small moustache twisted upwards into close curls at the corners of a mouth delicately formed and almost effeminate in character when relaxed, but which, when the lips were compressed, seemed full of deep expression both for good and evil,—the chin, clean-shaved and prominent, betokening firmness,—all combined to form a countenance in which decision and energy were evident; but, in spite of his good features, their general expression was repellant, expressing cruelty and lawlessness of no common order.

"He will never get across the Benathoora to-day, my friends," he said, stepping into a dry corner of the porch and sitting down; "and we have a weary journey to Itga before us in this mud; yet I dare not face the master, my uncle, without some news of him."

"Maharaj," replied Rama, respectfully, folding his hands—"Great prince"—by which title (an ordinary one of respect), or that of Jemadar, Gopal Singh was usually addressed by them—"I know the Benathoora, and she will not come down before night; and if it be true that the man left Kullianee yesterday, there is plenty of time for him to be here by sunset. Depend upon it, he will make for Allund to-day, and there will have been no deep mud for some hours after he left. Couldst thou see nothing on the road?"

"Nothing, Rama. At one time I thought I saw him at the gate of the village yonder, but as the rain

cleared off, it was only some cattle going in; then the mist closed up the view, and I could see no more, and came away. By Krishna, but this rain is something to see! I question whether he could cross the Nulla down there before Kinny, it seems filling so fast."

"Ah! he can ford it well enough if he is bent on coming," said Lukshmun, "and he could not stop at either village, for I told the Gowras* this morning, if a stranger came, to send him on with a guide, and to shut the gate if he wanted to stop. So, if he left Kullianee yesterday, he ought to have come a good distance before night; and if he started again this morning, there is no river, or Nulla, between to stop him but the Benathoora, and that will be fordable till midnight, even with heavier rain than this. He would not stay for the rain to clear?"

"He must have left it," returned the Jemadar; "he dared not stay there. One of old Lukmun Geer's disciples was to accompany him to a village half-way to Allund yesterday, and send him on from thence with guides from village to village. We offered escort, but he would take no one—the fellow was suspicious."

"Then he is quite safe, Maharaj. The guides may plague him; but if he started under injunctions from the old Bawa's disciple, he will be passed on carefully," returned Rama.

* *Gowra*, or *Patél*—chief authority of a village in the Mahratta country.

"I hope he is, brothers. I would not lose our chance of the gold he has for something—nor indeed of himself."

"Gold! Jemadar," cried both eagerly, in a breath.

"Yes, my friends; good royal mohurs, I know; for the day before yesterday he rested at the Gosai's Mutt,* and had a Hoondee † cashed in the shop. It was a goodly pouchful, I know, and it will come to us if we wait patiently."

Gopal Singh lighted some tinder with his flint and steel, and then a leaf cigarette, as we may call it, and began to smoke in silence, which was only broken by the dripping of the rain from the porch of the temple and the tree, the general plash over the plain, and the loud and continuous croaking of the frogs in the pools and puddles.

The Jemadar first broke silence. "Some one must look again," he continued, after a while; "and it is brighter now. Go thou, Lukshmun, take the blanket and sit close."

"It is not weather to turn out a dog," muttered the man, sulkily, getting up and stepping down from the porch; "but I will go, Maharaj, if it is your order. Shall I go on to Kinny," he continued, "and see if I can get tidings of him? Better that than sitting up there like a drenched scarecrow in a field."

"Good, brother, go! Try the Nulla before you venture into the middle of it, lest it be too strong for you," said Rama.

* Monastery. † Bill of exchange.

"And wait there for a time," added Jemadar. "If he do not arrive before night thou canst bring some flour, ghee, and sugar from the Patel;* for if we are to watch here all night we had need to eat, and I must make some bread; but if the man comes, bring him on—he will be well-mounted and will not fear the Nulla, and thou canst invent something about going back to Allund on urgent business."

"Trust me for that, Jemadar. If I have an ugly face I can speak soft words when I choose, and I know enough of the camp language to make him understand. Now, I am going." So saying, he doubled the blanket in a peculiar manner, so as to form a cloak, threw it over his head and shoulders, and folded the sides tightly about him; then taking off his sandals, which he carried in his hand, he strode away in the rain, as rapidly as the mud would admit.

"Take care of the thorns in the lane near the village; put on your sandals there: we can't have you troubling us with a Babool† thorn in your foot," shouted the Jemadar.

Lukshmun turned round and nodded his assent, and continued as before. They watched him silently till he disappeared over the brow of the eminence, when Rama said to his companion, "What if they have sent the man on by the other road, or warned him, Jemadar?" There was another road

* *Patél*—chief officer and authority of a village in Mahratta districts.

† Mimosa.

which passed about half a mile to the south of where they sat.

"He dare not, Rama; by his soul he dare not," replied the Jemadar, with flashing eyes and distended nostrils. "Do you think he would dare my uncle's vengeance? does he wish his cattle to be harried by Pahar Singh, and his village burnt?"

"Perhaps not; and it would be likely enough to happen, Jemadar," said Rama, laughing; "and, I suppose, we should have to come to do it. But what is to be done with the man? — That?" and he pointed significantly to the old well with his thumb.

"O no, Rama," returned the other, laughing in his turn. "Nothing of that kind, now. The man himself is precious, why, the uncle knows, and some more of them, though they have not told me. I only hope he will not make a fight of it and get hurt."

"Then we could not help it, of course, Jemadar."

"No, indeed, friend. But we are three to one, and he is only a Mutsuddee * after all—not a man of war—he will be quiet enough, I dare say."

"Well, if I am to say the truth, Maharaj, I am glad of it," returned Rama. "It is all very well to kill people in a fair foray, or if anybody will fight in a Durôra,† one's blood is up, and it does not matter; but, somehow or other, the last affair here was not agreeable, and ever since I have not liked the place at night. We need not add to the people that lie yonder," and he pointed over his shoulder to a corner

* Clerk, or secretary. † Gang robbery.

of the tree, "unless, indeed, it is to be, then of course we can't help it."

"Nor I either, Rama. It is only pleasant here when there are fifty or sixty good fellows assembled, and the gold and silver are boiling in the pots yonder. I don't like this new business as well as the old—— By Gunga, what a flash!"

Indeed the flash of lightning, which caused both to start to their feet, was nearly blinding. Without warning, except by the passage of another dark cloud above, it had fallen on part of the old tree which was separate from the rest—a branch supported by two roots which had struck into the ground—and had riven away part of it, which fell across the mound of stones with a loud and heavy crash, and was followed by a cracking peal of thunder, so loud and so near that the men involuntarily put their hands to their ears.

"It would have killed him if he had been on the stones," said Rama, who first spoke, as the peal, spreading itself over the heavens, was dying into deep growls in the distance. "By all the gods! was there ever such thunder?"

"It will break up the clouds, perhaps," returned the Jemadar, "and this rain will then stop. Yes, it was a narrow escape, indeed, and we may be thankful he went. It is a good omen for us, Rama!"

"I vow a rupee to be inlaid in the floor of the temple of Dévi, at Tooljapoor, and to feed twenty-four Bramhuns," said the man, reverently. "Yes,"

he added, looking up and over the plain, "I think it will break up before sunset."

But we must follow the spy on his double errand, while the pair, who still converse, speculate upon the probable issue of it, smoke by turns, and long for a break in the rain. And there is another person, too, who must needs be looked after on his journey hitherward.

CHAPTER XI.

A STOUT serving-man was holding a powerful grey horse, which, well, if not handsomely, caparisoned, stood neighing loudly before the door of an ordinary house in the main street of Surroori, a small village nearly midway between the towns of Kullianee and Allund, as a person within, evidently of a superior class, was girding up his waist with a shawl, and otherwise preparing himself for a day's journey. Of middle stature, thin but well-proportioned, with a light bamboo-coloured complexion of a pale cast, and a slight habitual stoop, the man seemed unaccustomed to rough exertion; and the sword he had just fastened into his waistbelt, along with an ivory-handled poniard and knife, was apparently more for ornament than for use—such a one as might be used at court, or by a boy,—not the weapon of a soldier.

The man's face was clean shaven, except a long mustache, which drooped very much at the corners, and the features were by no means ill-favoured. A first glance showed an expression of much intelligence, mingled, however, as you looked further, with

much cunning. The eyes were small, deep-set under bushy eyebrows, and of a light grey; the nose high and aquiline, but broad across the nostrils, and hung over the moustache in a peculiar manner; the forehead was wrinkled into furrows by habitual elevation of the eyebrows; and, as far as the upper part of the face was concerned, it had an appearance of firmness, which the lower portion belied; for the mouth, drawn up at the corners in a constant and apparently hypocritical attempt to smile, was evidently performing an office foreign to its intention; and the chin, which suddenly retreated into a somewhat bony throat, had no character but decided weakness, if not, indeed, actual cowardice and deceit. Thus, the whole features wore a restless, suspicious, and hypocritical expression, which, most likely, was a true indication of the possessor's mind.

Lalla Toolsee Das was not a native of the Dekhan, but had served for the last two years, or nearly so, in the Dufter, or Record Office of the Emperor Aurungzeeb. The Lalla had been sent from Delhi to his uncle, who was in the Emperor's service: and, having given proofs of ability as a Persian scholar, he had been appointed to a confidential situation about the Emperor himself. What use the Lalla had made of his position will appear hereafter, as also why he now undertook a long journey alone, in a strange country, and at an inclement season of the year. Meanwhile we have only to describe his progress, which, so far as the weather is concerned, appears uncertain.

The Lalla had risen early, bathed, breakfasted, and packed his saddle-bags. He had looked out several times since morning, but always with the same result as to the sky, which continued of a dull, leaden grey, with occasional rain. There was no wind, it was close and hot, and his host, an old Byragee,* who was a lay monk of the Mutt, or monastery, at Kullianee, which the Lalla had left the day before, was persuading him to remain. But the indifferent night's rest he had endured from the venomous musquitoes, the moaning of a cow over a new-born calf, and other noises from cattle and goats,—from the women, who ground at the mill so early in the house, singing a discordant Canarese song—and, above all, his personal anxiety to proceed,—have weighed against the weather.

"Ah, my poor Motee,"† said the Lalla, as he heard his horse neigh, "thou wilt have a hard day of it, I fear, in the mud. How far didst thou say it was, Bawa Sahib?" he continued to his host.

"It is six coss,‡ by our reckoning here, by one road—seven or eight by the other," replied the Byragee, "which, in the coss you are accustomed to in Hindustan, will be ten one way, and thirteen the other."

"And you recommend the longest road, Bawajee?"

"Well, sir, it is as you please. You will have somewhat less mud and stones by the upper road than by the lower—that is all."

* *Byragee*—one of the orders of recluses. † *Motee*—pearl.

‡ A coss is two and a half to three miles in the Canarese districts of the Dekhan.

"Ah, friend," continued the Lalla, as we shall call him, "four coss more at the end of a hard day is not pleasant, and so the less the better. Let me see; here is my route. Ah, Kinny, little and great; I suppose I can rest at either if I like, though I should prefer getting on to the worthy Fathers' Mutt at Allund."

"Certainly," replied the old man; but do not stop at Kinny, if you can help; and, above all, do not shelter yourself at the temple on the hill, under the 'Burr' tree. Ah, yes, there will be heavy rain to-day, Lallajee, for it is so hot," he continued, looking up at the clouds, now deepening into fringes of black here and there; "you had better stay."

"No, Bawa, I must go on; and if it rains I can't help it. But about the tree," the Lalla continued; "I suppose there are sprites and devils in it as usual; and, to say the truth, I am not afraid of them. A man that always lives among soldiers, you know, gets brave."

"Indeed," returned the Byragee dryly. "O, of course! But take my advice, and when you change guides at Kinny, ask them to send you by the south road; it's—it's the best, and some bad places are avoided. But here is the Patel," he added, as that functionary, emerging from his doorway opposite, with a striped blanket over his head and shoulders, saluted the Lalla with a loud "Numascar Maharaj!" "He will direct the guide himself, Lallajee, which will insure a speedy and safe journey."

They followed the Patel through the village, which, under the steadily increasing rain, looked sufficiently wretched to deter any one from staying, who had not urgent necessity for doing so. This was not the Lalla's predicament; and he now unfastened a large thick felt travelling-cloak, from the pommel of his cloth saddle, put it over his head, and wrapped it around him so as to cover his legs, which were protected by long, soft, Persian riding-boots.

Few people were astir. Under shelter of the house-walls the dogs had assembled in groups, and, standing with their tails between their legs, barked at the stranger as he passed. Pigs and fowls, being disturbed by his horse, ran to and fro, with noisy grunt and cackle. Some cattle stood together in parties near their owner's houses; a heavy steam from their nostrils ascending into the thick air, and broke the silence by an occasional hoarse low. Here and there a stout motherly dame, with a child seated astride on her hip, and others hanging about her, stood, nothing abashed, at her house door, looking at the Lalla as he passed; or a farmer, with his blanket cast over his head, smoking his morning cigarette, lounged under shelter of his own eaves, and exchanged a morning greeting with the Patel. The spouts of terraced houses were beginning to run fast, and small streams of water were already making their way through the mud.

In the gateway were two or three "jowans," or young men, who watched and guarded it, and acted

as messengers. One of these was sent for a guide, and the party staid under shelter till he arrived, when the Lalla and his bundle were formally made over to him, to be delivered up at the next village, about two miles distant; and finally, the Lalla mounted.

"Don't forget the south road from Kinny," said the Byragee, wishing him a good journey, as the Lalla, making his parting salutation, rode out of the gateway.

"Who is that?" asked the Patel. "You kept him mighty close in your Mutt last night."

"I don't know," returned the other; "but he goes on the government business to Beejapoor, and you know the order which came with him. I suppose it is some secret matter, else he would have had an escort."

"Well, he is gone, whoever he is," said the Patel; "and I would rather he travelled than I, even on that good beast of his, to Allund, to-day. It is going to rain badly—but it will do the grain good." And so they fell to talking of their farms, and the prices of grain at the last market, while the Lalla and his guide proceeded onward.

If the Lalla could have understood his guide, the way might have been beguiled by pleasant gossip of the country round; but of the vernacular of that part of the country he was profoundly ignorant, and every attempt he made in the "Oordoo," or court language, was met with a curt "Tillid-illa"—"don't understand"—or an occasional very expressive pan-

tomimic action on the part of the guide who, looking back, sometimes pointed to the bundle on his head, then to the rain, and again tapped his own stomach, or stuffed his fingers into his mouth, conveying the intimation that he expected to be well rewarded, and was very hungry. Thus the next village was reached, the first guide was dismissed with a little extra gratuity, and the Lalla again proceeded with a fresh one.*

The ranges of low hills crossed from time to time had been stony but firm ground, and as yet Motee had not suffered. The dreaded river, which might have cut him off from Allund, was now behind him; and, after ascending a small eminence, and a wide plain appeared before him, our traveller congratulated himself on a speedy arrival at his destination, having, as he considered, got over at least one half of his journey.

Very soon, however, the rough, stony path changed into one which at times was difficult to discern at all. The plain over which the road now lay was cultivated as far as could be seen, but the fields were as yet unsown. Step after step the mud appeared deeper, the stones in it more numerous and slippery; and, in fact, after about a mile, during which the rain had fallen more heavily than ever, the plain appeared covered with water, which could not run off, and the

* Each village is obliged to furnish a guide to travellers on payment of a small gratuity, and these men relieve themselves at every village.

black soil of the road and fields to have turned into liquid mud, barely able to support the stones which lay so thickly upon it. So long, too, as the rain had not penetrated far below the surface, Motee's feet had at least the dry earth to rest upon; but now not even that remained, and yet the gallant horse struggled on, snorting, and occasionally plunging, but evidently becoming wearied by efforts which had no respite. Still the guide led on, sometimes by the road-track, sometimes by its grassy banks, and again leaving both, struck into other paths through the fields which promised firmer footing.

The rain continued to pour in torrents: indeed, it was more than ever violent: and a flash of blinding lightning, followed by a roar of thunder before them, promised worse weather. Poor Motee even winced, evincing a strong determination to turn round and set his tail to it; but a few words of encouragement from his master, and being led a few paces by the guide, restored his temper, and he proceeded gallantly.

At the junction of two roads, the guide paused for a moment. One, it was clear, led to a village they had seen for some time past, the trees of which loomed large and heavy through the thick air, but it appeared out of direction of the path. The Lalla's stock of Canarese was simply nothing—of Mahratta not much more; but the name of his destination was, at least, intelligible. "Allund," he said, holding out a rupee between his finger and thumb, "Allund!"

The guide grinned as he took the coin. "Allund!" he returned affirmatively, and striking into a path to the right, the Lalla could see that, by avoiding the village to the left, the road led apparently in the direction of what looked like a clump of trees standing out against the sky. Was that the banian tree of which he had been warned by the old Byragee at Surroori? The Lalla's little stock of Mahratta was again put into requisition, and the guide seemed to understand it readily.

Yes, the village to the left was Little Kinny; that to the right, great Kinny, and that was the "Burr" tree beyond. Good; then he had only to avoid the tree, if that indeed were necessary. Since the peal of thunder the rain had decreased, and a breeze was springing up in his face, which was very refreshing. The clouds, too, were breaking, as appeared by patches of bright fringe in the south-west. The guide pointed to them cheerfully, as he moved on at a steady pace; for the plain, though muddy in parts, was now not so bad as what he had already passed. So, as our friend is likely to reach Kinny without farther trouble, let us see what Lukshmun has been doing since we left him.

The little rivulet in the valley was above his knees as he passed it, and, to any one who did not know it, the ford would have been dangerous; but Lukshmun waded through, without apprehension, and a few minutes after, as he entered the village gateway and shook the rain from his blanket, a group of people

assembled there welcomed him with a hearty shout of greeting.

"We thought you would have given it up and departed," said the old Patel, who, with his son, a few of the village farmers, and the Putwari, or accountant, were sitting in an open chamber of the deep gateway, the usual place of business. "We thought you would have gone away, else I would have sent up some milk. Why did you not come and sit here, instead of in that ungodly place up yonder? Here, one of ye," he continued to a group of "jowans," who were sitting in the opposite chamber, "take his blanket and dry it. Hast thou eaten to-day, friend?"

"Nothing but a bit of stale cake I had in my waist-cloth," replied the man; "only that my teeth are strong, it would have broken them. The 'poor man's' bread in the Mutt at Kullianee is not dainty food, and the flour was musty, O Patel!"

"Take him away to the house, and let them feed him; the women will have something good, I dare say," replied the Patel. "Go and see."

"And no one has passed since morning?"

"Not a creature. It is not weather to send the dogs out; and the mud from Kulmus to Kinny and hitherwards will be hopeless. No, he won't come to-day; but go and eat, friend—go and eat."

"If I am wanted," said Lukshmun.

"Jee, jee! Ay, ay! I will not forget you. Go!"

"What does he want out such a day as this?"

asked the Putwari; "What has Pahar Singh in hand just now?"

"What does it matter to us, Rao Sahib?" returned the Patel; "all we have to do is to keep his people in good humour, to save our cattle from being harried, our stacks from being burned, and our people," he added, looking round at the farmers and their wives, "from being robbed when they come from market? That is worth what we pay him. Should we have got the crops off that disputed land at Chitli if he had not sent those spearmen?"

"No, no; do not interfere," said a chorus of farmers' voices, who, in those unsettled times, might, unless their village were known to be under the protection of some local chieftain, at any time have their flocks and herds swept away by the people of a more powerful village, or by any of the independent gentry, or barons, as we may call them, of the country. "What have we to do with state affairs, or with Pahar Singh either?"

So the assembly having voted non-interference with whatever might be in hand, our friend Lukshmun was allowed to get his meal in peace. Smoking—the impossibility of getting anything—and a tight waistband, had kept appetite down as yet; but with the Patel's kitchen in prospect, it rose fiercely for the occasion as he approached the house.

Lukshmun washed his feet and hands before he entered and sat down. O what a smell of fried onions there was! and, as a girl set before him a pile of hot, well-buttered jowaree cakes, a cup full of

"char," or pepper-water with tamarind in it, a fresh leaf full of a savoury stew of vegetables of all kinds, and some *dall* or pease-pudding, well-seasoned with red pepper and garlic, Lukshmun's heart expanded, and he set to work with a good will. Every now and then a woman at the fireplace asked him if he would have more, and it was brought him from the pan, smoking hot. Lukshmun dallied with each morsel as he ate; and when even reduced by repletion to licking his fingers, grudged the summons brought by a man that he was to come.

"Couldst thou not give me a few cakes, O sweet one, and some dall?" he said to the good-natured looking wench who had been serving him. "I have a brother—hungry—all day in the rain—while I have eaten. Thou art like the moon, O beauty, and thy heart as soft as water. Give me the cakes for a poor, weak, hungry brother."

"Was there ever such a tongue and such a face?" retorted the damsel, laughing. "Look, Rookmee!"

The cook turned round and looked, too, laughing heartily; for Lukshmun's attitude on one leg, with the sole of the other foot pressed against the calf of it, his hands joined and stretched out imploringly, and his seared face twisted into a grotesque expression of supplication, was not to be resisted.

"Give him these cakes," said the cook, handing two to the girl.

"By your antelope eyes, O sweet ones, more!" he said, not altering his posture. "Do you think two

would fill a hungry man's belly? By your lotos feet——"

"There, begone!" said the cook, handing him a few more and some dall; "there is a meal for a Rajah. Go, if the mistress should hear you——"

"I am gone, O my beauties," continued Lukshmun, folding the cakes into his waistcloth, and tying them behind, then washing his hands elaborately. "You have made my heart——"

"Come quickly, come," said a voice at the door; "they want thee. Wilt thou eat all day?"

"I worship you, lovely nymphs, even as Rama adored——"

"Begone!" cried both the girls in a breath. "Here is the mistress coming, and if she hear such nonsense thou wilt be whipped."

"Here is the man who will be your worship's guide," said the Patel deferentially to our friend the Lalla, who, having arrived safely, was now divested of his upper clothing which some of the men were drying in the opposite chamber, and seated in the place of honour of the assembly; "but your worship should eat before you go on, and the Rao Sahib here will take you to his house—a Bramhun's house," he added, as the Lalla appeared to hesitate.

"Ah no, sir," returned the traveller, who indeed was very hungry, "I could not eat without I bathed, and I had better wait till I get to Allund. Shookr, shookr!* I should be too long about it, and my horse

* Thanks, thanks.

has had his feed, and is ready to go on. And this is the guide?—not beautiful exactly."

"No, Maharaj, I am not beautiful, truly," replied Lukshmun, with a deprecatory gesture to the Patel, "but I may be useful to this noble gentleman. You may trust me, my lord. The Patel knows me, and so do all these worthy gentlemen; and am I not come for you?"

"They expect me, then, good fellow," replied the Lalla, amused by the man's broken Oordoo, and his grotesque expression of face.

"Ah, yes, noble sir," answered the man, joining his hands, "ever since morning; and as I was coming here on business I was told to bring you on. And now let us proceed, else it will be night ere we reach Allund; and," he added, with a wink to the Patel, "it is not good to be out late on the roads."

"What, are they dangerous, then?" asked the Lalla, looking anxiously around him.

"O no," cried Lukshmun, interposing readily; "there is no trouble in the country, and my lord is armed, and so am I. O no, only in regard to the mud and the stones. My lord will not find the road long, for I can sing him Mahratta 'lownees'* if he likes."

"There was a tree and a temple which I was told to avoid, and to ask to be sent by the south road," said the Lalla, preparing to mount.

Lukshmun exchanged glances with the Patel

* Ballads.

and the Putwari. "Could any one have warned the stranger?"

"A tree!" said the Patel, gravely. "What tree? dost thou know any, Lukshmun? And the south road? what road?"

"O, I suppose the noble gentleman means that by Navindgee, and Hoshully, and Chik-Wondully, and Hully Sullgarra," said Lukshmun, rolling out a volley of hard Canarese village names. "That road? Why it is six coss further from here! They should have sent him by it from Surroori. No," he continued, dropping the Lalla's stirrup, which he had taken in his hand, "if the gentleman likes to go he can do so, of course, but his slave begs to be excused;" and he put his joined hands up to his nose.

"Very good," said the Lalla, "I don't know; only I was told——"

"By whom?" interrupted the Putwari.

"By Déo Bawa, the Byragee at Surroori."

"O, the old Bawa!" said the Patel, laughing. "Curious, is it not, noble sir, that the old man thinks there are devils in the tree? He tells me he was bewitched there once, and I ought to cut it down."

"And I told him I was not afraid of them, Patel; but he said there was something else," returned the Lalla.

"Robbers, I suppose," said Lukshmun, readily; "Pahar Singh's men, perhaps."

"Perhaps," added the Lalla, "but he did not say so."

"Well for him," thought the Putwari, "or his stacks would have been burnt to-morrow night."

"Ah! no fear of thieves when you have one of 'the hunchbacks' with you," said Lukshmun. "Come, mount, my lord. Salaam, Maharaj," he continued, making a mock salutation to the sun, which was just struggling through a cloud. "Salaam! thou hast been moist to-day; come out and dry thyself and us too. Now, noble gentleman, mount, and you will see how fast the excellent dinner I have eaten in the Patel's kitchen will take my feet to Allund, and the good horse, too, looks as fresh as if he were but just starting," and he patted him. "Ah, well done, sir!" he continued, as the Lalla mounted not ungracefully; "we poor Dekhanies cannot compare ourselves on horseback with you northern cavaliers. Come, sir, the road waits for us."

And with a salutation all round, the Lalla rode out of the gate, and our friend Lukshmun, cutting a caper which showed his marvellous activity by way, as he said, of getting the dinner out of his legs, and calling to the guide who carried the bundle, they passed on over the village common.

The Putwari sighed as the party left the gate.

"I tell thee, Seeta Ram," said the Patel, "he will come to no harm, and he is gone away happy."

"I am glad he did not eat at my house; it is not pleasant feeding a man who has death in his throat," returned the Putwari.

"I tell thee he is safe," retorted the Patel; "and if he is killed, it is no affair of ours."

"No, it is no business of ours," said the Putwari, settling to his accounts with a sigh which vexed the Patel. "No, it is no business of ours," echoed the farmers.

At that time Rama, who was seated on the heap of stones, looking from the top of the hill, exclaimed, as the three persons emerged from a lane into a low field in which the road was distinctly visible,

"Jemadar! he is coming at last, and Lukshmun is with him; we must be ready. Look, they are there!" he continued, as Gopal Singh joined him, "between the village and the stream."

"Ah, I see them, Rama, and thy brother is as true as gold. We will join them as they go on; he must not suspect us yet."

CHAPTER XII.

Our friend the Lalla was soon at his ease with his new guide, whose injunctions to Motee, bidding him "take care," "mind a stone," "lift up his feet," and the like, encouraged the good beast, who now stepped out briskly, while the curious mixture of Oordoo and Mahratta, in which the small gossip and scandal of the neighbourhood was told him by Lukshmun, amused him much. The mile or so which intervened between the village and the temple was soon passed; and as they began to ascend the short rising ground towards the temple and the tree, the latter could be seen in all its wild picturesque detail, and was indeed a striking object.

The sun had now broken forth, and its beams shone slantingly through its rugged trunks and gnarled branches, resting brightly upon the glossy foliage sparkling with raindrops, and lighting up every excrescence and furrow of the knotty bark, casting broad shadows on the road below: while a slight parting shower, the large drops of which flashed brightly in the air as they descended, pattered upon

the leaves, and spread out into the valley in a silver rain. As the travellers gained the summit, the clear sky beyond to the west not only caused the tree to stand out boldly and grandly against it, but the brightness of the sun dispelled the gloomy associations which the appearance of the place had suggested during the rain. A slight breeze, which had hardly been felt in the hollow, rippled the little pools on the roadway and on the plain beyond the tree, which, level and stony, continued, apparently many miles, in the direction they had to go.

Motee paused at the summit of the eminence, and the Lalla could not help stopping him to look back upon the road by which he had come. The bright yellow gleams of the sun shone broadly upon the two villages, and upon the rich green masses of their cornfields. In the distance both looked pretty and comfortable: and their terraced houses, several white temples, and the dome of a small village mosque shone brightly in the sun. Behind these, and to the south, the plain over which the Lalla had come stretched away for many miles, showing the trees of a village here and there, with the occasional sparkle of a white house or temple among them; and behind all, the great black cloud of the day's rain, upon which there was a rainbow forming of great beauty, and against which a flight of white storks flashed like silver in the sun. Away to the south, the eye followed hollow and rise, undulation after undulation, till they were lost in a farther distance, which melted tenderly into the sky.

"It is a fair country, friend, after all," said the Lalla, "though it did not look well in the rain. That plain yonder is in the direction of Beejapoor, perhaps?"

"It is, sir," returned Lukshmun; "that high land, near the sky yonder, is beyond the Bheema river, and, if we were there, we should see the tomb of the great Sultan Mahmood, now finished. It is very grand, sir, and shines like silver when the sun is on it; and when I go there," continued the man, "I stand like a fool, looking at the King's palace, the Ark fort, the great gun, and the 'Ibrahim Roza'—that's the place where Ibrahim Adil Shah was buried, you know sir——"

"Numascar Maharaj," cried a clear manly voice, now beside the Lalla's horse, which appeared to him to rise out of the earth, for he had not observed the approach of Gopal Singh and Rama from the temple.

"Who are these?" exclaimed the Lalla, starting and beginning to tremble—"who are these?" and the warning of the old Byragee now came upon him, with the distressing conviction that he ought not to have regarded it; but it was too late. "Who are ye?" he asked anxiously.

"O, this is my brother Rama," said Lukshmun, assuringly, "and that is our Jemadar Gopal Singh; they only waited here while I went to Kinny."

"Be assured, noble sir," added the Jemadar, laughing, and in good Oordoo, with a slight southern ac-

cent, which seemed to assure the Lalla, "there is nothing to fear. Your worship is from Kullianee, perhaps."

"Yes, from Kullianee yesterday."

"Ah, yes, I remember; you were at Poorungeer's Mutt. I was just about leaving when you arrived, and the old man offered you escort of my party, but you preferred staying."

"I—I—I—had business," replied the Lalla, stammering, not exactly relishing Gopal Singh's bold looks, and yet unable to object to him. "I was tired and needed rest, and you could not wait."

"You had come from the royal court, I think they said, and were going to Beejapoor with letters for the King—proposals for peace, perhaps."

"So they said—who?" Of all things, the Lalla supposed his destination and business were at least secret; yet they appeared known, and to a perfect stranger, too, by the wayside. He did not feel able to reply, and was almost inclined to trust to Motee's speed, and break through the men; but Lukshmun, on receiving his matchlock from his brother, fixed the match, which had been hanging loose upon the cock, in a very precise manner, pressing the trigger to see if the match descended upon the pan. The others, too, looked carelessly to the priming of their guns, but to the Lalla's idea ominously, and as if he should understand the action. Lukshmun's face, too, appeared changed—it was not so pleasant as it had been.

"Come," said the Jemadar, "we have far to go to-night—what kept thee so long, Lukshmun?"

"O, the Patel at Kinny said we were to escort this worthy gentleman, as government orders had come about him from Allund; so I waited, as the rain had delayed him."

The Lalla felt reassured; his arrival was no doubt expected. "Ah, yes, sir," continued Gopal Singh, "you had better have come on with us three days ago, but it does not matter now. That is a fine horse of yours," he added, patting Motee's neck, "and from Hindustan, I think, as my lord is. We, too—that is, my family—are also from thence, Kanouj Khutrees; so is this good gun, too;" and he held out his own. "Yes; one can hit a man on horseback at full speed half as far as to the stream yonder."

It appeared to the Lalla as if the Jemadar was reading his thoughts as clearly as if he were telling them himself.

"And if we were in battle," he continued, "and any one were trying to get away from me, he would be shot between the shoulders before he could even reach the tree yonder."

"I—I—have no doubt of it, Jemadar Sahib,"* returned the Lalla,—"no doubt: and your speech is pleasant to hear after the rough language hereabouts."

"Come, come," cried Lukshmun, with seeming impatience, "if you want to pay compliments, noble

* *Sahib*—sir; a general adjunct of respect.

sir, wait till we get to the end of our journey. Come!" and as he spoke he touched Motee's rein. "Come on, my son!" he said, and the horse followed.

As they passed the little temple in its loneliness under the shadow of the huge tree, it looked a place for evil deeds. A large horned owl on the highest branch, now awakening for his evening flight, hooted loudly above them, and was answered by another. It seemed an evil omen, and struck to the Lalla's heart.

"Ah! we cannot pass you, my friend," said Gopal Singh. "Look, Lalla Sahib, what my gun can do."

As he spoke, he raised the piece and fired. The aim was true and deadly, and the huge bird fell down heavily close to Motee's feet with a rushing sound, causing the horse to start back.

"I never miss," said the man, decidedly, and reloading his piece. "Now, come on."

"Shabash!* Well shot," said the Lalla; but his heart was throbbing fast, and it was a positive relief to him when the dark grove was behind them, and they emerged upon the bare, wild, open plain beyond.

"A lonely place that, Jemadar," remarked the Lalla, turning to the man who walked behind him; "and the old Byragee, where I slept, advised me not to go by it; he said Pahar Singh's men might be about. Who is this Pahar Singh?"

"Pahar Singh?" returned the Jemadar, "O, a

* Well done.

worthy gentleman who is quiet enough when not plagued. He is the lord of the marches hereabouts —a valiant man, and a good soldier; and in these troubled times, Lallajee, has his friends and his enemies, like most of us: 'tis the way of the world."

After another mile, during which none of the party spoke, the Jemadar proposed to the Lalla to dispense with the guide. "Evening was drawing on," he said; "they knew the country, and the contents of the bundle could be carried on the saddle or divided among them;" and, indeed, it appeared necessary, as the guide, limping, declared he could go no farther, and had a thorn in his foot. The necessary arrangements were soon completed; and, between the Lalla's saddlebags and his saddle, the contents of the bundle were soon disposed of; the guide received a small gratuity, and retraced his steps at a far more rapid pace than he had advanced.

"He has no more a thorn in his foot than I have, Lalla Sahib," said the Jemadar, laughing. "Look how he goes! but Bheema there is no worse than his fellows, and does not like the idea of a night journey without change. Now we shall get on better. Let the horse walk out, Lukshmun; only keep by him."

Lukshmun let go the rein, but he did not leave his place, and though the rate at which the horse now proceeded kept the men at a rapid walk, and occasionally, indeed, at a trot, they preserved the positions they had taken up without alteration, speaking little among themselves, except occasionally in Mah-

ratta or Canarese, with both of which languages they appeared familiar.

The sun was setting in great glory. After the heavy clouds had passed away to the eastward, a clear blue sky succeeded for a while; but as a gentle breeze arose, it had brought up with it light, fleecy vapours, which, as the wind again died away at sunset, became motionless, and, gradually attracted to each other, formed piles of white clouds edged with deep grey. As the sun declined, white became orange and gold and crimson: while the sky itself, of an intense purple above, faded into green, yellow, and rosy tints, on which the golden clouds seemed to float in soft but brilliant masses: and, as it dipped below the horizon, a flood of light suddenly shot up, tinging the lower edges of all the lighter portions with vivid scarlet, and mingling with the deep orange and purple hues above, gorgeously.

"The gods have a festival upon Mount Meru to-night, Lallajee. Does the sun go down in that fashion in your country?" said the Jemadar, pointing to the sky and breaking a long silence. "We have made good work of it since the guide left us. Come, here is a little stream, and you need a change of posture; dismount and rest, while I offer my evening libations to the four elements."

"No, I will not dismount, Jemadar," returned the Lalla; "you will not be long, and by all means let your men get a drink of water too, and wash their feet. I will stay here."

"He is not to be trusted," said the Jemadar to his men in Canarese; "I see it in his eyes. If he stirs, shoot him, and both of you stay by him."

Rama had fastened one of the horse's tether-ropes about his waist, and he now proceeded to tie the end of it to the cheek-strap of the bridle in a methodical manner.

"What are you doing?" cried the Lalla, alarmed at the action; "loose it!"

"Oh, my lord will dismount," said Lukshmun, "and who is to hold the horse?"

"I am not going to move: loose it, I say!" cried the Lalla, impatiently.

But Rama sat down doggedly at a little distance, holding the rope, and began deliberately to munch a cake his brother had unfastened from his back, resting his gun across his knees.

"Loose it!" again cried the Lalla, "Jemadar, why have I been tied like a thief?"

The Jemadar had divested himself of his upper clothing and stepped into the stream; he was taking up water in his hands and pouring it to the four quarters of the earth. His clothes and arms were on the river bank.

"There is no use in disturbing him, Maharaj," said Lukshmun, quietly; "he is at his prayers, and can't hear. My brother, you see, doesn't understand you, and he only does what the Jemadar told him; so get off and walk about a little. Come, I will hold the stirrup for you."

"No; loose the rope!" cried the Lalla again, eagerly, and reaching over to do so himself.

"Ah, Maharaj! you must not do that; you see my brother will be angry. I advise you to be quiet," said Lukshmun, putting back the Lalla's hand, and pulling the knot of the rope firmer.

But the Lalla could not now contain himself; his alarm was gradually increasing. He thought he could break away from the men, and dash through the stream ere they could fire at him. Touching Motee with the bridle and his heel at the same time, he aroused him from the sluggish position he had assumed, and moved him a little so as to face Rama, who still sat eating; and the Lalla was quietly gathering up the reins preparatory to urging the horse forward, when the keen practised eyes of the men detected the intention. Excited by his rider, the horse gathered himself on his haunches and made a bound; but Lukshmun, leaping at the bridle, hung on to it, jerking it back so violently that the horse reared, while the Lalla, whose right arm had been seized by Rama, lost his balance, and fell heavily to the ground.

Hearing the cries of the men, Gopal Singh had run from the stream hastily, taking up his sword, and reached the spot as the Lalla fell.

"Get up!" he cried, seizing his arm; "what folly is this? By the gods, he has fainted! Thou hast not used thy knife, Rama?"

"Not I, Jemadar; but he fell heavily. What could

I do? He would have been off, for the horse is a strong beast, and I could hardly hold him—only for the old trick. Get some water, Jemadar, he will drink from thee. I will hold him up. Stay, here is his lota."*

While the Jemadar ran for water, Rama knelt down and raised the Lalla's head, who now opened his eyes. "Speak to him, Lukshmun; tell him to get up and be quiet," said Rama to his brother.

"Do you hear, Maharaj? you are to get up and be quiet. Rama says so," cried Lukshmun, "and he is not a child."

"Nor I, Lalla," said the Jemadar, returning with the water. "By Krishna, what made thee vex the hunchbacks? they were likely to be rough enough if provoked. Art thou hurt?"

"No, my lord—that is, valiant sir—only a little," replied the Lalla, moving his body about to ascertain the fact. "No; but my life!—O spare my life!—do not kill me."

"I am more hurt than he is, Jemadar," said Rama, rubbing his arm, "for he fell on me. Ah, you rascal!" he continued with a Mahratta oath, "only for the Jemadar there I had settled accounts with thee; get up!"

"I petition," said Lukshmun, who led up Motee, now calmed, "as the Lalla broke faith with us, that he walks; and Rama rides, as he is hurt."

"Ah, by your heads, no!" exclaimed the Lalla; "I never could walk a cose in my life; and my feet

* Drinking-vessel.

would never go over these stones and briars. Kill me, if ye will, but walk I cannot."

"Tie him up," suggested Rama, "if he can't walk; we must not trust him in the dark on that good horse."

"A good thought," said the Jemadar; "give me his sheet from the saddle."

The Lalla guessed what had been said, and protested and resisted vehemently; but he was as a child in the hands of the men, and in a few moments his hands and arms were swathed to his body gently within the sheet, but so that he could not use them: and he was raised to his feet, trembling violently, while the bandage was fastened behind him.

"Ah, sir! do not shake so," said Lukshmun, smiling, and joining his own hands in mock supplication; "if you do, you will go to pieces, and there will be none of you left when we get to our uncle, Pahar Singh."

Pahar Singh! the Lalla's heart sank within him. But he had no time for remonstrance. He was lifted like a child into the saddle, the men resumed their arms and positions, and again set forward.

"Where are you going to take me, Jemadar?" asked the Lalla, trembling, as they crossed the stream. "Ah, be merciful to——"

"So you have got speech at last," returned Gopal Singh. "Listen, Lalla, if you had been quiet you should have ridden like a gentleman, now you go as a thief. Pahar Singh, my uncle, is lord of these

marches, and knows what to do with you. One thing, however, I may tell you; if you make any further attempt to escape, I will shoot you. It is not your carcass that he wants, but what you have on it; the gold you got at Kullianee. Now, beware, for you know the worst."

Of what use was resistance, and the Lalla clung to life. They might take his gold. There remained, at least, the papers he possessed; and if he begged his way on foot to Beejapoor, what matter, so that he got there with them?

So they proceeded as rapidly as the ground would admit, still continuing to avoid all villages by paths through the fields, with which they seemed perfectly acquainted.

Before they reach their destination, which they will do in two or three hours more, we may describe the person to whom they are proceeding.

CHAPTER XIII.

As at the banian tree, when Lukshmun was guide, and the Lalla had ridden up the rising ground, the sun had shone out brightly with a broad gleam through its giant trunks and branches, and over the villages and corn-fields beyond; so about the same time the light, glittering through the watery particles which filled the air, spread over a rich landscape, as viewed from a height above the pretty village of Itga, whence, by a rough stony path, a company of horsemen were now proceeding to the village itself.

There might have been twenty-five to thirty men, from the youth yet unbearded to the grizzled trooper, whose swarthy sunburnt face, and large whiskers and moustaches touched with grey, wiry frame, and easy lounging seat on his saddle—as he balanced his heavy Mahratta spear across his shoulders—showed the years of service he had done. There was no richness of costume among the party; on the contrary, the dresses were worn and weather-stained, and of a motley character. Some wore

thickly quilted white or chintz doublets, strong enough to turn a sword-cut; or ordinary white cotton clothes, with back and breast pieces of thick padded cloth, or light shirts of chain-mail, with a piece of the same, or twisted wire, folded into their turbans; and a few wore steel morions, with turbans tied round them, and steel gauntlets which reached to the elbows, inlaid with gold and silver in delicate arabesque patterns.

The caparisons of their horses were as shabby as the dresses; but some had once been handsome, with embroidered reins and cruppers, and gay muslin martingals. All were now, however, soiled by the wet and mud of the day. It was clear that this party had ridden far, and the horses, though excellent and in high condition, were, from their drooping crests and sluggish action, evidently weary. Four of the men had been wounded in some skirmish, for it was with difficulty they sat their horses: and the bandages about them, covered with blood, showed the wounds to have been severe. But the sight of the village appeared to have revived the party: the horses were neighing and tossing their heads, and the men, shifting their places in the saddles, pointed eagerly to it, or, brandishing their spears, shouted one to another, cheering up the wounded men.

Among these horsemen, as also over the valley below, the sun's gleams shone brightly, casting long

irregular shadows over the ground as they moved, and, glinting from spear-head, morion, and steel armour as the men swayed in their saddles, lighted up faces of varied character, all now joyous, but wearing an expression of habitual recklessness and lawless excitement.

Below them, at less than half a mile's distance, was the village itself. In the centre of it, or rather more to the right hand, was a high square castle, with round bastions at the corners, having loopholed parapets which, where it had not been wetted by the rain, was of a warm grey, the colour of the mud or clay of which it had been built. It was in perfect repair, and the close smooth plastering of the walls and parapets, showed that the weather was not allowed to injure it.

Inside the castle walls were the white terraced roofs of a dwelling-house, and in the bastions in the east and north corners several windows and other perforations in the curtain walls, which showed that rooms were connected with them; but it was clear, from the height of the parapets above the ground, which might be sixty feet, that most of the inside must be a solid mass of earth, as indeed it was as far as the courtyard, around which were the houses already noticed. On one high bastion, in which several small cannon were placed, was a flag-staff, and a large white flag, bordered with green, which floated out lazily upon the evening breeze, showing the device—a figure cut out in red cloth and

sewn upon the white—of the monkey god Hunooman, who might be supposed to be, as he was, the tutelary divinity of the castle.

To protect the gateway there was a double outwork with several narrow traverses and large flanking bastions, but otherwise no additional defence to the castle walls, which were quite inaccessible. Around their foot, separated only by an open courtyard, surrounded by a low wall with bastions at intervals, were the terraced houses of the place, thickly placed together, and filling up the space between the outer wall of the village and the castle itself. There was no doubt that the community living there was thriving, and better protected than those of the more open villages of the country. The houses, too, were of a superior and more substantial character, and gave assurance of habitual safety and wealth.

Outside all, ran a high wall, also of mud, with large round bastions at intervals, loopholed and mounted with jinjalls, and other wall-pieces, with two large gates, each defended by an outer work and traverse, and heavy bastions on each side; and there were several smaller wickets or posterns, each with a parapet wall before, and a tower beside it. The whole formed a very strong position, impregnable against any attack by marauding horse; and even in the event of a siege by a better organised force, it could have held out stoutly.

The ground for some distance round Itga formed a clear natural esplanade, over which it was impos-

sible for anything to advance without being seen from the castle walls. This was now like a carpet of emerald green, on which fell the broad shadows of the tall trees near the gates and a grove round a small Hindu temple, and several large herds of cattle rested or browsed before entering the village walls for the night. Beyond the open ground the irrigated fields and gardens of the village commenced; and the bright yellow green of the sugar-cane, in large patches, catching the sun's rays, glowed among the darker colours of the grain crops and cotton, which spread up and down the valley as far as could be seen, and on both sides of the stream flowing in the centre.

Above the village the valley appeared to contract gradually, and the stream to disappear behind a projecting bluff. Below, it opened out considerably; and could be seen for several miles, showing other villages in the distance, with their ghurries, or castles, of the same character as that of Itga, but smaller, rising above the trees; while, here and there, the white dome of a mosque, or steeple of Hindu temple, with portions of the stream, sparkled in the evening sun.

A fair scene now when, over the rich crops and gardens, and spreading over the tender distance, the bright evening light threw a mellow radiance, resting with brilliant effect upon the projections and bastions of the castle, upon the terraces of the houses, the heavy gateways, the people passing to and fro, and

the bright-coloured cattle upon the village green. A fair scene, truly, and in strong contrast with the character of the place, which, to say the truth, was evil enough in some respects.

The owner of this village, and of several adjoining villages, was the Pahar Singh, whom, casually, we have already had occasion to mention. Nominally a frontier officer of the Beejapoor State, "Hazaree," or commander of a thousand men, and holding the estate in maintenance of a troop of horse and a number of foot-soldiers, which, though somewhat less, passed for a thousand in the royal musters of Beejapoor,—Pahar Singh had by no means followed his father's example of steady devotion to his duty, or confined his men to the purpose for which they were intended. During his father's lifetime he had engaged with the most dissolute and lawless of his father's followers in border raids and forays without number, and had not unfrequently defied the troops of the State, bringing his father's good name into very questionable repute.

After the old man's death, wilder times ensued, when a bold stroke, here and there, decided a man's career; and proportionately as he was powerful or otherwise locally, his influence, both at court and in the provinces, extended. Pahar Singh had struck many such, with which, however, we have no concern. Following the example of the Beydur chief of Sugger, he had imposed a system of black-mail all over the frontier near his estate, which, if not regularly paid, was enforced roughly enough; while, on his

part, his clients were protected from violence by other parties. The system, in fact, extended to the capital itself, and merchants and rich travellers paid Pahar Singh's dues as the best means of escaping outrage if they had to travel across his marches.

To others but his own people, Pahar Singh was a merciless savage, for the most part; and even his own relations, and those who knew him best, could hardly account for the variation of temper which could watch torture for the extortion of money—perhaps an agonised death—at one moment, and at the next listen to a tale of distress, or need, or sickness, and relieve it himself, or send it to his wife Rookminee, with a message which insured prompt attention from that kind lady.

It is perhaps unnecessary to go far back into history for illustrations of character like that of "the Hazaree." Such still exist among the native states of India, and even among our own subjects, restrained by the power of the paramount Government, if not by the spirit of the times—but still restrained—from lives as reckless and lawless, from savagery as deep and as unrelenting, as was that of Pahar Singh. With such characters evil passions have taken the form of sensuality in its varied phases, which, as mostly concerning the individual himself, blunts the exercise of all finer feelings, but does not occasion the misery to others which would be the result of unfettered and misguided action.

The party we have mentioned had descended the

small pass from the table-land above, and had pressed merrily on to the village gate, where they were met by friends, and welcomed by many a rough but kind greeting, and by a discharge of wall-pieces from the bastions, and shots from the castle, answered by the matchlocks of the party. Having entered the deep arched gateway, they were now emerging irregularly from its shadow into the main street, down which the sun streamed brightly. The terraced houses were covered with women and children waving cloths, or whatever they could catch up. The shopkeepers, for the most part, descended from their seats and exchanged respectful greetings with the leader; and as the small troop passed up towards the open space below the castle, still firing shots, it was plain that every one had forgotten the fatigue of the march in his safe return.

The horsemen remained mounted after the halt, and several stout serving-men took the heavy bags of money which each in succession loosed from his saddlebow, and carried them into the castle. This done, the leader dismounted, and the chief "Karkoon," or scribe, delivered a short but pleasant message from the chief, and dismissed the rest; and the men, wheeling round, discharged an irregular volley from their matchlocks, and, passing back round the foot of the outer bastion of the court, separated, each to his own house.

"He will not delay you long," said Amrut Rao, the Hazaree's chief Karkoon, or scribe, to the leader;

"but you are not to go, he says, without seeing him."

"What temper is he in?" asked the person addressed.

"Not good—but no fear for you. He is angry at Gopal Singh's absence, that is all; so be careful, Maun Singh, and do not cross him to-day. Come, he has looked for you these many hours."

Maun Singh, an active, intelligent man, with a bright soldierly bearing, was a cousin of the chief, and a valuable and trusted leader of partisan expeditions. This foray had been remarkable for its success. A convoy of treasure, belonging to the neighbouring kingdom of Golconda, had been attacked on its way to the capital, its escort defeated, and the money for the most part secured and brought in. The largest portion of the force was returning by a different road; this, consisting of picked men and horses, had pressed on home with the booty.

Maun Singh entered the gate with his companions, and ascended an inclined plane leading to a court above, which, the outer one of the interior of the castle, was that to which men were alone allowed access. On two sides were open verandahs, consisting of double rows of wooden arches, supported upon carved pillars, the floor of the inner one being raised a little above that of the outer. On the east side, a large chamber of some pretension, ended in an oriel window, fitted with delicately carved shutters, which admitted light and air. This chamber was three

arches in depth, and the wood-work of the pillars was carved in bold designs of flowers and leaves, the ends of the beams being fancifully cut into dragons' heads, the lines of which were carried gracefully into the general patterns of flowers and leaves. This was the chamber, or hall, of audience.

On the fourth side of the court was a stable, and a door which led to servants' rooms and offices, and there were folding-doors in the verandahs on both sides communicating with women's apartments, and stairs leading to the roofs of the buildings which formed the parapets for defence of the castle.

As he entered the court, Maun Singh greeted, and was saluted in turn by, those around; and a party of scribes, engaged in accounts at the entrance of the hall, rose at his approach. Passing these, he went on to his relative who was sitting reclined against a large pillow in a recess of the window, and who half rose as he returned his salutation, but not courteously.

Pahar Singh was always remarkable—no one could look on him unmoved. He had a strong-featured hard face, prominent aquiline nose, deep-set black eyes, not so large, as penetrating in character, and covered by bushy eyelashes. The eyes were restless and unsettled in character, and, by this, and the general expression of his countenance, he was nick-named the falcon. None of the hair on his face was shaved, and the whole was tied up in a knot and wound round his head in a thick heavy mass, while the thin grey and sandy-coloured beard and

mustaches, divided in the centre, were usually passed over each ear, but could, if he pleased, be worn flowing down to the waist. The forehead was high and covered with deep wrinkles, and upon it the veins from the root of the nose stood out roughly and with a knotted appearance, apparently the result of habitual excitement. The mouth had hard cruel lines about it, and the sinewy throat tended to increase the rugged character of the whole countenance.

In age he appeared past forty. Naked to the waist, his figure was wiry, and showed great power, particularly in his arms. Pahar Singh's strength was proverbial in the country; and the large exercising clubs, standing in a corner, which he used several times during the day, could be wielded by none but himself.

"I received your letter, Maun Singh," he said, before that person was seated. "Why did you delay? Why did you let that boy leave you? By Gunga, if the boy dies, or comes to hurt, your life shall answer for it."

"Pahar Singh," replied the other, who always addressed his cousin by name if he were angry, and who had less fear of him than any one else, "I have done good work. There are more than twenty thousand rupees yonder, and I have only lost one man."

"True, true, brother," cried the chief, waving his hand; "there is no blame for that, only for the boy. What took him to Kullianee?"

"I sent him to Poorungeer, the banker, with the

bills, to see if any were negotiable. There he heard of something; and when all was quiet at Muntalla, he departed at night without my knowledge. He only left word that he had gone after some good business, and was not to be followed."

"Wrong, Maun Singh. Thou wert wrong not to watch him—not to send men after him. If he dies, O Maun Singh, O brother, it were better thou wert never born!" and the chief smote his pillow angrily with his clenched fist.

"His fate is not in my hand, Pahar Singh," retorted the other; "and——"

"Do you answer me? do you answer me?" cried the chief, savagely grasping the pillow, the veins of his forehead swelling and his nostrils dilating as he spoke.

Amrut Rao knew the sign, and interposed. "Is this money to be counted?" he said, pointing to the bags; "if so, give me the key of the treasury, and let the Jemadar go home. He is tired, and you will like to see the coin. It shall be counted before you."

"Good! Go, Maun Singh. I shall be quieter when you return," replied the chief. "Ah, yes! we were once the same, brother. We could not be stopped either," he said more gently, "if we had anything to do."

"The hunchbacks are with him, and they are all on foot, brother," returned Maun Singh: "fear not; but if thou art restless, give me some fresh men and a fresh horse, and we will ride round the villages."

"No; go home—go home. No; let him hunt his own game," returned the chief.

"But about the money? Déo Rao wants to get home now, for he is starving," interposed the Karkoon.

"Let him go then!" exclaimed the chief tartly.

"No, he can't go till it is counted," retorted Amrut Rao.

"It need not be counted."

"It must be counted, Maharaj! If there is a rupee wrong we shall never hear the last of it. The bags have never been opened—who knows what is in them?"

"It may be gold, Amrut Rao. Come, who knows? yes, who knows? Come," exclaimed Pahar Singh excitedly.

Few could take the liberties in speech with the chief that were permitted to Amrut Rao, and even he was not always successful; but now the Suraffs, or money-changers, sent for had arrived, and Pahar Singh watched the opening of every bag with an almost childish curiosity. All anxiety for his nephew had departed before the sight of money. Yet Gopal Singh was the life and stay of the house; precious as Pahar Singh's heir, and more so as the husband of his daughter, who was as yet a child.

"Good coin, good coin!" cried the chief exultingly, as the contents of the bags passed through the experienced hands of the examiners without one being rejected. "Good coin! O Amrut Rao, I vow all the light weights to feed Bramhuns. Dost thou hear?"

"I am afraid their bellies will be empty enough,"

returned the Karkoon, laughing. "No, Maharaj! do better: send five hundred to Vyas Shastree to offer at the shrine of Sri Mata* if Gopal Singh returns safe to-night. You cannot disappoint her and be secure."

"Well spoken! well spoken! Yes, put the money aside; yes, put all the light-weight coin and make it up; thou shalt have it——if——he comes. Holy Gunga! what is that?" he exclaimed, suddenly, as a separate bag rolled out of one then being emptied. "Gold, by all the gods! Give it me; I will count it myself."

* "Holy Mother," applied to Bhowani.

CHAPTER XIV.

We must, however, return to our travellers, whose progress since night set in had been anything but agreeable, considering the state of the road; for though the light-footed men traversed it easily, poor Motee, weary enough, stopped fairly where the mud was deepest, and quivered in every limb in the intervals of stony ground. Indeed, he would have given up long ago but for Lukshmun, whose cheery voice and hand, now soothing, now encouraging, now remonstrating, urged him to put forth his whole power; and as if the promises of a good stable, the sweetest fodder, the best grain, which were repeated with every endearing variation that Mahratta and Canarese, oddly intermixed with scraps of Oordoo ballads, could supply, seemed to be understood by the gallant beast as he toiled on. His master, since he had been swathed up in the sheet, and had found it impossible to help himself, had fallen into what might be called a passive frame of mind. Nothing was clear to him, neither where he was, nor with whom or where he was going.

As before, villages were avoided, and it was evident that his guides knew the country perfectly—threading lanes, then emerging into open fields, again crossing waste ground, but still preserving, as nearly as possible, the same direction, as the Lalla could see by the moon which, struggling through masses of watery clouds that had risen since sunset, threw a misty and indistinct light upon the path and what lay in its immediate vicinity. Now and then they approached so near a village that the watch-dogs within its walls bayed and howled, and they could hear the hum of voices, or see lights high up in the ghurry, or the watch-towers at the gates; but they did not stop. All the Lalla asked occasionally was, "How far yet?" and received but one answer—"Coss bur."* The trees of village after village, and the dark square forms of their ghurries, or castles, stood out against the moon in succession, and each one he hoped might be the last; but still they went on, through the same apparently endless succession of muddy lanes, and over open fields and waste lands,—faster if the ground were firm, slower if it were muddy.

Finding it of no use to speak to his companions, the Lalla's mind reverted naturally to his own condition, and was as busy now, though after a more dreamy fashion, than in the morning, when riches and honours seemed within his grasp. For after some misgivings he had argued himself into a belief of a positively agreeable reception by Pahar Singh.

* "About a coss"—two miles.

He would not at once admit his errand to the Beejapoor court, but reserve it for a confidential communication; and he would be able to tell Pahar Singh about their own country. Yes—the Lalla had framed, and was framing, many irresistibly polite speeches in his mind, recalling verses to quote from Persian poets, and the replies to his remarks would necessarily be in a similar strain. What else could be expected of one of his own countrymen? and he would make allowances for some omissions in strict etiquette and courtesy. Then what excellent cookery he should enjoy—what luxurious rest!

Alas! these were but the delusions of hunger, thirst, and weariness, and were but shortlived; for in their place would suddenly arise a ghastly anticipation of violence—a dungeon and chains—ending in a lingering or sudden death. Or, again, the loss of all his papers and his money—both as yet safe. Or, perhaps, of being taken again to the royal camp, and sold to the Emperor, a hasty doom following—an elephant's foot, or *that* executioner, always present, whom he so well remembered.

There was no denying that such thoughts would recur more vividly than the others, causing the Lalla to writhe in his bonds, and to break out into a cold sweat from head to foot, in, as it were, the very bitterness of death. This past, he would sink once more into apathy and weariness, while Motee groaned, trudged, and splashed, or Lukshmun cheered or warned him; and the two others, in their old

places, their lighted matches glowing in the darkness, never varied in position or in pace.

It might have been the close of the first watch of the night, perhaps more, when the Lalla became sensible of a change in the demeanour of the men. They talked more among themselves, and laughed heartily. Gopal Singh even told him to be of good heart. The road, too, was more open and less muddy. Before him was a rising ground, and upon it a tree distinctly visible against the moon, to which they pointed, and stepped out at a better pace. As they neared the tree they halted for a moment, shook out their dresses, resettled their turbans, and rubbed up their mustaches. Yes, they were most likely near the end of the journey, but the Lalla dare not ask; his tongue was cleaving to his mouth with that peculiarly exhaustive thirst which is the effect of weariness and terror combined; and when all three men blew their matches, and shook fresh priming into the pans of their guns, the Lalla shut his eyes and ex pected death.

"Come, Lallajee," said Gopal Singh, in a cheery voice, "don't go to sleep, good man, we are near home now; no more 'coss burs,' you know. Ah, by-and-by, you will know what a Canarese coss is. Mind the horse as we go down-hill," he continued to Lukshmun. "I must have that beast; he has done his work right well to-day."

Almost as the last word was spoken, they reached the brow of the ascent, and looked down upon Itga

from the place we have already described. It appeared gloomy enough to the Lalla. The castle, or ghurry, stood out, a black mass, against the setting moon, and the men and horses were barely distinguishable in the faint light, while the towers at the gate, and round the outer walls, seemed to be exaggerated in height and dimensions. From the window, over the castle gateway, a light twinkled brightly in the dark mass of the walls, and there was one also on a bastion of the gate, and a few here and there in the village. Around the fields and trees were in the deepest gloom, the upper portion of the trees, where the moon's rays caught the topmost branches only, being visible, and a sparkle here and there in the little river, as it brawled over the rocks and stones in its bed, its hoarse murmur being distinctly audible as though it were in flood.

"Cheer up, Lallajee! be comforted; our master never keeps any one in suspense very long," remarked Lukshmun pleasantly. "When he says ch-ck, ch-ck, as I do to Motee here, we know exactly what to do."

"Be quiet, for a prating fool, as thou art!" cried Gopal Singh, "and look after the horse. I would not have his knees broken for a thousand rupees. Sit square, O Lalla! lean back, good man, and ease him as you go down. Do not be afraid."

But for this assurance the Lalla had fainted. "Ah, Jemadar," he exclaimed, "by your mother, I am too

poor to notice—a stranger in a strange land. I trust to you—pity me, and be merciful, for the sake of my children."

"Bichara! poor fellow, he has children—so have I," interrupted Lukshmun; "and that makes it worse sometimes."

"Be silent, as you love your life," said the Jemadar, firing a shot over the Lalla's head, which caused him to start violently, and was followed by another each from the two men in succession; "be silent, and mind your seat down-hill. If Maun Singh has not arrived," he continued to the men, "there will have been trouble enough by this time."

"They have passed not long ago, Jemadar," said Rama; "look, here are the horses' footprints."

"That is good; and they see us now," continued Gopal Singh.

As he spoke, a vivid white flash, from the highest bastion turret of the castle, increased in brightness, as a large Bengal light was burned for an answering signal. The attitude of the signal-man, as he held an iron cresset high above his head, could be distinctly seen; and while the dazzling blaze continued, castle, and town, and village—even the open ground beyond, and the trees and temple upon it—were revealed in silvery brilliance. Then, as the first died out, another light took its place, and burned out, leaving the gloom more intense than before. Under any other circumstances, the effect would have been as

surprising to the Lalla as it was really beautiful, but, under the circumstances, the sudden apparition of the castle, with its defences and outworks, struck an additional chill to his heart, and as the last gleam of the bright light went out, it seemed a type of the extinguishing of his own hopes.

CHAPTER XV.

PAHAR SINGH had been long watching from the window we have before mentioned. There were three descents from the plain above to the village, all within his view; and there were men on each of the bastions also, watching in all directions. He was very restless and moody; not even the gold found in several bags which he had taken to his private apartments—not even the large amount of booty, which had so few light coins in it—could dispel the gloom. He had ordered all about him to be silent, and even Amrut Rao had obeyed him as yet; and his little daughter, who was allowed to sit in the hall when no strangers were present, had nestled to his side, but was afraid to speak.

Amrut Rao knew, however, by experience, that the more his master was allowed to brood over anything in this manner, the harder it was to rally him; and as the account of the money had been made up, he took the paper, trimmed the lamp, and stood in an attitude to read, unchecked by the actual distortion of the chief's face in a repressed fury, at which even

his daughter concealed herself, and cowered into a corner, and which soon broke out in violent oaths and abuse.

Amrut Rao bent to the storm, and did not reply. After an interval he read slowly :—

"Twenty-seven thousand two hundred and ninety-three rupees; and the five bags of ashruffees * which you took inside—how many were in them?"

"What is that to you? do you want to steal them? By the gods! you are over-familiar to-night, Amrut Rao. Did I not bid ye all be silent, and dare you disobey? you — dare you?" cried the chief, raising himself, while the foam gathered upon his lips, and the veins swelled on his forehead. "Dare you?"

"My lord," replied Amrut Rao, joining his hands, "abuse of a Bramhun, out of a noble mouth, is sin—unfitting to hear. Be reasonable. This is the best booty which we have seen for many a day. If we knew the total of the ashruffees we could add it, and you could sign the day-book, and clear away all the bags. It is getting late."

"Let it be. No, I will not sign the paper," cried Pahar Singh, petulantly. "What need have I with wealth? he will not come now. I will go to Kasee,† Jugunath, and Raméshwur; I will give up the world; I have committed much sin, and will have no more of it. I will—— Ha, by the gods! there is a shot on the road," he continued, as the sharp ring of Gopal Singh's matchlock broke the silence without:

* Gold mohurs. † Benares.

"another, and another! and a horse's neigh, too; and there were but the three. Can it be they, Maun Singh? speak! by your soul, speak: why are you silent?"

"Let the cloud pass from your spirit, brother: it is they, sure enough. I would swear to Gopal's gun by its ring anywhere."

"Burn a light from the upper bastion—two; it may cheer them down the pass. Quick!" cried the chief; "answer their signal. O Maun Singh! if I said anything bad, forgive me, brother; but I was distraught with care for that boy. Yes, they will see that," as the first blue light glittered over the village. "Burn another, Ranoba—a large one!" he called from the window to the men above; "we may even see them. By the gods! yes, Maun Singh, there they are: the three, and a man on horseback muffled up—a large grey horse—who can it be? Get hot water ready, and enough for all to eat. Bring a goat to kill before him. Tell thy mother, O daughter, to see to this; tell her they are come. How many short rupees were there, Amrut Rao?"

"My lord, it was as I said: the Bramhun's bellies would be empty if we trusted to short rupees; all we could find were nine doubtful ones."

"Then, count out fifty more—stay, a hundred: will that feed them?"

"You have not told me how much gold there was, Maharaj," continued the Karkoon pertinaciously, not noticing the gift.

"Now, a plague on thee for an obstinate fool, Amrut Rao," replied the chief, laughing; "did I not tell thee not to speak about it?"

"The total of the silver is twenty-seven thousand two hundred and ninety-three rupees," returned the Karkoon; "and the gold must be added to complete the account before we retire."

"Well, then, there were five bags, and fifty Akburi mohurs in each: will that content you? or must you see them?"

"Why couldn't you tell me this at first?" continued Amrut Rao, writing in the account, which he spread on his left hand; "there, at twenty rupees each, another five thousand, that makes thirty-two thousand two hundred and ninety-three rupees. My lord ordered fifty rupees for the dole to-morrow; it might as well be the odd ninety-three."

"Ay, take that, and the two hundred over to boot, good fellow, if thou wilt. Here, some of you, stop him, stop my son, and kill a goat before him at the gate; see that lights are waved over him, and the evil eye is taken off him. Quick! there are the torches flashing in the Bazar."

"I have deducted the sum, Maharaj," said the Karkoon deliberately; "now look at the total, and put your seal to it. Thirty-two thou——"

"By Krishna! thou wouldst leave me no peace, Amrut Rao," replied the chief; "here is the seal; seal the memorandum, and begone. Yet stay; thou art a good fellow after all; so take a handsome

doopatta,* or a pair of dhotees,† out of that coin for thyself."

"Not out of the Bramhun's bellies," retorted the Karkoon; "thank you. I shall have plenty of gifts by-and-by. Here is your seal."

The chief might have answered angrily, had his attention not been diverted at the moment. "Ah, here they are," he cried, looking from the window; "they have brought the man's horse up to the steps, and are taking him off—bound, too! Ai Purmésh-war!‡ but there must be much to hear. Why do they delay?"

In truth they had not delayed; for several torch-bearers, stationed at the gate, hearing the shots on the hill, had run forward in the direction of the pass, while the retainers and others from the bazar, crowded up to bid the young man welcome; for the anxiety in the castle had spread over the village. So Gopal Singh and his party entered the gates among many eager faces, lighted up by torches tossing above them, and were welcomed by noisy shouts as the men clustered round them. Then a bevy of village women awaited them, some bearing brass dishes filled with mustard-seed, and small lighted lamps, which were waved over him; others with jars of water, which were poured out before him; and, as others joined them, there was quite a procession up to the end of the second traverse.

Farther on, at the gate of the castle, stood a body

* Muslin scarf. † Waistcloths. ‡ A name of Divinity.

of the household servants and retainers, one having a naked sword, and a goat before him bleating loudly. As Gopal Singh advanced, the sword flashed in the air, and the headless carcass struggled convulsively as the blood spouted over the sill and step, and trickled down towards the Lalla, who, lifted from his horse, shuddered as he was set down among it.

Again the ceremony of having lights waved over him by some of the women-servants was repeated; and Gopal Singh, bidding Lukshmun and the others search the Lalla carefully and keep what was found, ascended to the court, and was met in a warm embrace by his uncle, and led to the window, where, being seated, all present, including Maun Singh, advanced to salute him in turn.

"What did I say, brother?" cried Maun Singh joyfully. "I knew he would not disappoint us. Yet thou shouldst not have gone alone, Gopal."

"Nay, but I had the hunchbacks with me, and more would have spoiled my small hunt, which, if not so grand as thine, uncle, may yet be important," replied the young man.

"Ah, the boy, the boy!" exclaimed the chief, stroking the young man's face, and kissing the tips of his own fingers; "have I not brought him up since he was the height of my knee? And I thought him lost—Ai Bhugwân, Bhugwân! Ai Purméshwar!* He is safe and well—safe and well, O Sri Mata! My

* Hindu appellations of the Divinity.

heart swells. What did I say for the Bramhuns? Never mind now. Go, bathe and eat, my son, and we will see to everything afterwards."

"Not before that matter is settled, father—that is, about the man I brought with me."

"Yes, I had forgotten—certainly. Light the large lamps," cried the chief to the attendants at the lower end of the room; "let us see what manner of man he is. Who is he, Gopal?"

"That we have to find out, father. They thought him a spy of the Emperor's, and he came from Aurungabad, by Bheer, to Kullianee, to the Gosai's. He changed some bills for gold, and he has got it. I offered escort, but was refused; so I went from Muntalla to the Bur tree at Kinny, for we heard he was going to sleep in the Mutt at Surroori. They were sending him on privately, father."

"Shabash! well done, son. A spy? Well, if we are true to the King's salt, he goes no farther; and he was being sent privately! Ah, the old foxes! Here he is—what a sight!" cried the chief, breaking into uncontrollable laughter. "Who art thou? What have they done to thee? Speak."

In truth the poor Lalla was a show. The order to search him had been literally complied with, and while two stout fellows held his arms wide apart, he was helpless to struggle. Rama and Lukshmun, who would allow no one to touch him, had dived into every pocket, and felt every possible place of concealment, even to the Lalla's hair, which was loosened

and hung about his shoulders. His turban had been removed and shaken out, while one end was now fastened to his right arm. The bag of gold, tied round his waist, his bundle of precious papers, his sword, dagger, and waist-shawl, had all been taken from him and made into a bundle, and the articles were deliberately counted by the hunchback as they were deposited, one by one, in the centre of the shawl spread out for the purpose. It was quite in vain that the Lalla entreated, besought, struggled, or resisted by turns; the place, the rough men around him, all forbade hope of pity, and he submitted. Finally, Lukshmun dragging him by the end of his turban, Rama pushing him behind, and several of the others assisting, the Lalla was brought into the presence of the chief, where he sank down, stupidly staring about him.

Where were all the fine speeches he had contrived, which should have carried the chief's heart at once? All the couplets, too, from the Bôstan that he was to have quoted?—All gone. His head was bare, his clothes untied and hanging loosely about him; his boots removed: and his appearance of utter helplessness, and the hopeless, piteous expression of despair in his face, might have excited compassion in any but the hardened men by whom he was surrounded and confronted.

"Who art thou, knave? Speak," cried the chief, sternly, again raising his voice and checking his laughter. "Who art thou?"

"There now, make a salaam to the 'Lion of the Jungle'" (as the chief was called among his people), said Lukshmun, raising the right hand of the Lalla to his head, which dropped helplessly. "Ah, I see he is ashamed, poor man, of his naked head. There, Lallajee," and he wound the turban round his head hastily, giving it a ludicrous cock to one side, increasing, if possible, the grotesque expression of the features—"there now, get up and make your Tusleemât,* else my lord may be angry; and he is not exactly safe when he is," he added in a whisper. "Get up, and don't be afraid."

But the Lalla's terror was too great, his mouth too dry to speak. "Amān, amān!—Mercy, mercy!" was all he could gasp.

"Who art thou, knave?" cried Pahar Singh again. "Whence art thou come? Give a good account of thyself. Let go of him, rascals!" he continued to the men who held him; "begone, all of ye."

"Maharaj," cried Lukshmun beseechingly to the chief, "here are the Lalla's things; who will take them? Look, Rao Sahib," he continued, to Amrut Rao, "here they are: count them. I have done with them—for the Lion is getting savage—let me go. Beware, O Lalla! take my advice, and tell all about yourself, else I shall have to kill you somehow. You don't know the Maharaj as I do."

This advice, and the diversion effected by the hunchback, afforded the Lalla a little time for the

* Three obeisances, stooping each time to the ground.

recovery of his senses; but who could have recognised the bland, accomplished Toolsee Das, in the abject figure before them? Hastily pressing the turban straight upon his brows, the Lalla arose, and, as well as he could, made the ordinary Tusleemât.

"Shabash!" cried the chief. "Well done, that was never learned in the jungle. Now speak truly, and at once, who art thou?"

"Noble sir," returned the Lalla, "I claim your protection. There has been a mistake about my treatment. My property has been taken, and I have been misused——"

"I misuse thee, knave?" cried Pahar Singh, his brow darkening; "who art thou to bandy words with Pahar Singh? I have never seen thee before."

"Beware, Lallajee," said Gopal Singh; "did I not warn thee? Say who thou art at once, or I will not answer for thee. Do not eat dirt."

"Peace, boy!" interrupted the chief angrily; "the fellow looks like a knave—a thief—his is no honest face. Speak; or, by the gods, there will be scant ceremony with thee!"

"My lord, my lord!" cried the Lalla piteously; "mercy, I am no thief; I am a poor Khayet of Delhi, travelling to Beejapoor, on business of my own—a stranger—a poor stranger."

"What business, Lalla?"

"My lord, we are merchants, and have dealings with people there for clothes and jewels. There is a dispute about the accounts, and I have come to settle

them," said the Lalla glibly enough. It was one of the stories he had made up by the way.

"Who are the merchants?" asked the chief.

"The Gosais of the Mutt at Kullianee, where I was yesterday; they sent me on," replied the Lalla.

"O, hear!" cried Gopal Singh; "they knew nothing about thee, except that thou hadst a bill on them for a thousand rupees, and the money was given thee in gold. Is not this true? Did I not hear it myself?"

"Thou art no merchant, dog," exclaimed Pahar Singh. "Did ever merchant make an obeisance like that? Ah, we are true testers of gold here; the true and the false are soon found out. Who art thou? speak truly, and fear not."

"By the shrine at Muttra, by the Holy Mother, I am what I say, a poor Khayet, a Mutsuddee * only. O noble sirs," continued the Lalla, "give me my property, and let me go. I will seek shelter in the bazar: let me go, for the love of your children."

"I beg to petition," interposed Lukshmun, joining his hands, "that, as I brought him, my share of the gold be given me before he goes. I took care of him on the road—did I not, master?"

"Silence!" roared the chief; "any one who speaks shall be flogged. Who art thou, O liar? Mutsuddee thou art, but whose? Thy speech betrays thee—beware!"

"I have told you, noble sir. Thakoor Das, Preym

* *Mutsuddee*—clerk.

Das is the name of the firm; my name is Toolsee Das —Lalla Toolsee Das, your slave to command. Ask at Kullianee, and the house will be known there. I—I —am a poor man—a stranger; who knows me?" said the Lalla, now whimpering.

"A fool, a liar art thou, throwing away life," returned Gopal Singh. "This is the second time I have warned thee. We know thou art from the royal camp, and a spy to Beejapoor. Speak, else——"

"And the doom of a spy is death; and thou art a liar too, and a coward to boot. Look at him now, Gopala," said his uncle, interrupting and pointing to the man; "look at his coward face."

The Lalla was trembling violently. His knees shook, and his teeth chattered audibly as he shivered. He could not speak, but looked vacantly from one to another. "I am c-o-o-ld—c-o-o-o-ld," he said faintly; "the wet, sirs, and the long travel. Amān, amān! I am only a merchant, let me go."

"Thou art cold! then we will warm thee," cried the chief grimly. "Yet, speak, O Lalla, ere I give the order. We would not hurt thee without cause—otherwise——"

"Ai Narrayen! Ai Ramchunder!* believe me, I am no spy. I swear by God I am no spy," he replied earnestly.

"Bind him!" cried the chief furiously. "A liar and a spy. Make torches of his fingers! we will soon hear the truth."

* Hindu names of the Divinity.

CHAPTER XVI.

ERE he knew what to do or say, the Lalla was a second time bound with his own shawl; and Lukshmun, tearing a rag into strips, and soaking them in the oil of the lamp, was tying them coolly upon the ends of his fingers, one by one. "I told you, Lallajee," he said, "we are rough people here, and you should be careful. When I light these you will not like the pain, and if you bear that, he will do something worse. When he says 'ch-ck, ch-ck,' you know——"

"Silence, knave! thou art over-familiar," cried Maun Singh; "beware!"

"Nay, but if I can save him from the torches, uncle," returned the hunchback, with a grotesque grin, "he will perhaps be grateful, and give his wealth to me."

"Is it ready?" asked the chief.

"Quite ready, my lord," answered Lukshmun, taking one of the lighted wicks from the large lamp between his finger and thumb. "For your life, speak, good fellow," he said earnestly and under his breath to the Lalla, "and save yourself this torture. One

word more from him, and I dare not disobey; few bear it—speak!"

"O, my lord! my lord!" shrieked the Lalla, now comprehending what was intended, and throwing himself prostrate on the ground, "do not burn me alive. I will speak the truth. Why should I tell lies?"

"Very well," returned the chief, on whose lips the ominous foam speckles were now visible. "Very well, get up; it is thine own business. Thou hast not heard of our Dekhan customs, perhaps, else I had not wasted words on thee. Speak, who sent thee? Alumgeer? He cannot help thee now."

"He would have no mercy on me if he knew—— if he had me in his power," murmured the Lalla. "Loose me, my lord, I am faint, and cannot speak; yet I will speak the truth. And should all these hear? My lord knows best. Loose me, and have these rags taken from my fingers."

"When thou hast told the truth, Lalla; not till then," said Pahar Singh, slowly. "Dost thou hear? Away, all of ye!" he cried to the attendants, who had crowded round the Lalla. "Keep the torch alight. Now, Lalla," he continued, as the man stood alone below the dais, "speak. Once more, and this is my last warning; if I hear any more lies I will end that coward life of thine."

"Beware!" added Gopal Singh, "I would not be as thou art with that lying tongue of thine—ugh! no, not for lakhs. Remember that he, my uncle, never relents."

"I would rather speak to ye alone," said the Lalla.

"We three are as one. Yet stay," added the chief. "Go thou, Amrut Rao, let him have his own chance for life—but remain without."

"Do any of ye know the seal of the Wuzeer of Beejapoor," said the Lalla, when they were alone, "or do ye know the writing of Sivaji, the Mahratta Rajah?" He spoke with great difficulty, for his mouth was parched and clammy, and his lips white.

"Nay, but Sivaji cannot write, Lalla. This is some fool's story. Beware, too, how thou takest the name of my lord the Wuzeer," said the chief sternly.

"My lord, my lord, with death before me and one chance for life, I cannot lie," returned the Lalla, sadly shaking his head. "My hands are tied; but if one of you will open that bag, there will be truth enough found in it to save me. There, Jemadar," he continued, as Gopal Singh opened the bag, "in the side pocket are two Persian letters, fastened up; look at them first; look at the seals. If I am wrong I am wrong—I am helpless, do as ye like with me; I am helpless."

"It is the Wuzeer's seal, his private seal, uncle," said Gopal Singh excitedly. "Of this there is no doubt; look at it yourself."

"Ai Ram! Ai Seeta Ram! what have we here? It is the seal truly," said Pahar Singh, looking at the impressions on both letters, and rocking himself to and fro."

"Do any of ye read Persian?" asked the Lalla;

"if so, read for yourselves. I need not speak; they will speak for me."

"I will try, uncle," said Gopal Singh; "give me the letters. By Krishna, father!" he continued, breaking the silence, and after his eye had glanced over a few lines, "I would rather go into the thickest fight, than read treachery like this. Narrayun, keep us!"

"Ay, may the gods be merciful, Gopala! But what is it?—what is it?" said the chief eagerly.

"He would sell our kingdom of Beejapoor to the Padshah * of Delhi, uncle——"

"People said so—people said so," said Pahar Singh interrupting; "but I did not believe it. What more, my son?"

"Nay, the style is too courtly for me to make much of it, but both the letters are to the same effect. Where didst thou get these letters, Lalla?"

"Noble gentlemen, if ye are true to your King's salt," exclaimed the Lalla, seeing that he had made an impression on his hearers, "then I deserve naught but good at your hands. I am in the royal service; I saw the papers; I read what danger threatened Ali Adil Shah; I took them; I escaped from the camp with them, to carry them to him, and I am here. O, noble sirs, put me not to loss and shame!"

On the next few words hung the Lalla's life. It were easy to kill him and secure the papers. The Wuzeer had sent several urgent messages to Pahar Singh lately. He had a matter of moment, attended

* King—emperor.

with great profit, to communicate. Was it about these letters? The Wuzeer would give lakhs for them. The very threat of disclosure to the King would extort any terms. Again, if he denied them—and what more easy than to counterfeit his seal, or use it upon forged papers? If he took this course, they would be in a false position: false to the King and to the Wuzeer,—and the King's threats had of late been very menacing. So, as they deliberated, the Lalla's life hung in the balance, now ascending, now descending, in the eager consultation which the three men carried on in Canarese. The Lalla looked from one to another in piteous supplication, not daring to speak, his mouth parched, and trembling in every limb; for he felt this quick discussion and the increasingly savage glances of the chief towards him, to be for life or for death.

"And this from Sivaji?" asked Gopal Singh, at length. "What of it, Lalla?"

"It was with the others, and there are some more of older date in the bag," he replied, "and of the Wuzeer's also. Sivaji's letters had to be translated to the Emperor: I had to copy the translations, and thus I came to know their contents. Noble sirs, I am telling no lies; look at the seal. They said in the Dufter it was Sivaji Bhóslay's. I do not know it myself."

"Keep the others close, and show this to Amrut Rao," said the chief. "Here," he continued, as the Karkoon, being called, advanced, "look at this; what dost thou make of it?"

The Karkoon looked at the seal and started. "May I open it?" he said.

"Yes, read it to us," said the chief.

He read it over slowly twice.

"Well, what is it?" asked his master.

"What Moro Trimmul wrote from Tooljapoor—what they asked you, my lord, to join in; and here is your name with five thousand men in figures after it, and the Wuzeer's with a lakh."*

"Is it genuine, think you? that is what we want to know," said Gopal Singh.

"Certainly," replied the Karkoon; "there is the private mark on the seal, and the signature 'Hé Venunti'—'this supplication'—is all the Maharaj can write. No one could forge that, it is too crooked. How did that man get it?"

"He stole it, Amrut Rao," said the chief; "and we are discussing whether he ought to live or die. What dost thou think?"

"As a traitor to the salt he has eaten, he ought to die, master," said the Karkoon, looking at the Lalla, who felt that his fate was in the Bramhun's hands, —but——"

"That is just what I said; he is not fit to live," interrupted the chief. "Let him die. Ho!"

"But"—continued the Karkoon in Canarese, persistently interrupting the chief, and waving back Lukshmun, Rama, and others, who were advancing—"if I may speak. He says he wants to take them

* One hundred thousand.

to Beejapoor. Let him have his own way. A bargain may be made with Ali Adil Shah through his secretary the Meerza—not by him (and he pointed to the Lalla), but by us. The letters will not alter the matter one jot, and my lord can act as he pleases afterwards. We can send people with the Lalla."

"Excellently spoken, Amrut Rao; ye have all better brains than I have. Then the papers are valuable?" said Pahar Singh.

"Yes, my lord, if properly vouched for; and the man who stole them can give a better account of them than we can. The King might give any money —a lakh of rupees—for them. He already more than suspects the Wuzeer and Sivaji Bhóslay of being in league with the Emperor, and would rejoice to get such proofs of their treachery."

"Hark ye, Lalla," cried the chief, changing the language to Oordoo, which he spoke well, "what didst thou expect to get for these papers? What is the price of them?"

"My lord," he replied, simpering and putting up his joined hands, "they may be worth lakhs—so the Gosais at Kullianee told me—anything I liked to ask. They will negotiate the matter with the secretary and the King for me; and if my lord would only condescend to assist, I—I—would give—yes, he might be sure of a share."

"I of a share!—of a bribe! Art *thou* feeding me with a bribe? O base dog, and son of a dog! Pig! I a share? O, Lalla, thou art surely mad, and

fated to eat dirt. Enough of this! Ho, without!—Lukshmun!—hunchbacks!—away with him; give him the handkerchief in the outer court. Quick!" roared Pahar Singh, relapsing into fury.

"Uncle! father! not now," cried Gopal Singh, entreatingly, and touching his feet; then rising and stepping forward with joined hands, "calm thyself. Not to-day, when I am safe; not to-day, when I promised him life! Give his life to me for this day; after that, as thou wilt."

"It is valuable, my lord," added Amrut Rao. "These papers cannot tell their own story. Where could we say we got them? He must go with them to authenticate them." Gopal Singh and I can go to the city with him, and, after all, he deserves well of Ali Adil Shah, though he has been a traitor to his own King. Give him to us, my lord; we may get good out of him."

"No," said the chief after a moment's pause, "no, Rao Sahib, I will go myself. I will see the end of this matter. Thou shalt come with me, Maun Singh; and we can work through thy brother, Amrut Rao. A lakh, saidst thou, O Lalla? Well, I will give thee a share if thou art true. And now I give thy life to thee—buksheesh!—a free gift—a new life, O Lalla. See that thou make good use of it, for what I give I can recall. Go; they will see to thy food and comfort, and thou wilt eat in a Rajpoot's house of the race of the Sun."

The Lalla would have said something about his

gold and his horse; the words were in his mouth, and it was well, perhaps, he could not speak. The revulsion was too great for him, from life to apparently imminent death, and again from death to life. Weary with travel and faint with hunger, he had sunk down insensible, and they carried him away into the court."

"The King has been seeking my life, friends, for some time past," said the chief musingly. "Perhaps it would be well to use these papers—that is—— Yes," he continued, "I have eaten his salt—I and my father—and we eat it now. My heart revolts at this treachery, and we can be faithful with many another. Let us rouse the boy. There should be good stuff in Mahmoud Adil Shah's son, and I will try it. As for the Wuzeer, I know what he would have me do, but I will not say it, else should we have been left quiet so long, and the army so near us? Stay ye here, Gopal and Amrut Rao. If he send for me, go to him at Nuldroog; 'tis but a ride. Go and take his money, then come to me at the city. I shall be in the old place; and bring the hunchbacks with you, there may be work for them."

The Lalla recovered as they carried him gently into the open air, and bathed his face with water.

"Ah!" said Lukshmun, who was the most active of his attendants, and was unbinding the shawl, "see what care I take of thee, O Lalla; better your fingers are sound than roasted; better your neck straight than twisted; better have to eat good food here—it

is so good—than have thy mouth filled with mud and water in the river yonder——"

"My gold, my gold!" gasped the Lalla, interrupting him, "who has got it? at least get that for me."

"He has got it," replied the hunchback, pointing with his thumb backwards. "Better he, than I or my brother; we should only spend it—he won't. Thy star is bright to-night, Lallajee. When thou art set free do not forget us, that's all. Come."

They conducted him to a small chamber within, where two decently-clad women awaited him—slaves or servants—and informed the Lalla that a bath had been prepared for him, and food would be served to him in the eating-room.

We are assured, therefore, that the Lalla was left in good hands. There was perhaps a shade too much garlic in the cookery, he thought; but he was not particular, and appetite returned with absence of fear. When he had finished, he was summoned to the chief, and it was not without apprehension that he went; but he was now received kindly, though with a rough sort of civility, and motioned to sit near Gopal Singh. So assured, the Lalla's habitual confidence soon returned, and he took his part, with much ability, in the discussion that followed, in which his information in regard to the Emperor's designs was most valuable.

How the consultation ended will hereafter appear in another locality, to which we must now transport our readers.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Azân, or evening call to prayers, had just ceased throughout Beejapoor. From mosque to mosque, and minaret to minaret, the sonorous and musical voices of the Muezzins had proclaimed the evening invitation to worship. It was still light, though the vivid hues of sunset were fading fast, and the warm red and orange tints, which had rested upon the minarets, domes, and gilded pinnacles of the palaces, mosques, and mausoleums of the superb city, were giving place to a sober grey. Here and there a star already twinkled in the heavens, and a few rosy clouds, on which the sun's rays rested lingeringly, floated away eastwards before a gentle breeze, that rustled among the tall palm-trees. For a time the busy hum of the populous city seemed to be hushed, and the stillness and seclusion of the spot we have to describe, prompted those feelings of devotion which the time required.

It was one of those small yet elegant mosques, which are found scattered everywhere about the ruins that now exist, surrounded by enclosures

that were once gardens, in which broken fountains and dry watercourses now only suggest visions of their former elegance and comfort, and where low brushwood and tangled grass have displaced the fragrant flowers and useful fruit-trees of former days. Here and there a jessamine, now wild, trails over ruined walls and once trim garden terraces, or a long-lived hardy lime-tree struggles for existence in the unwatered soil.

At the period of our tale, however, the building was in its full freshness and beauty. A single arch, of low Saracenic form, led into a square room vaulted by delicate groins, leading from the corners to the base of a cupola above. The floor was formed of chequers of black and white marble, highly polished; and the sides of the room, deeply indented by arched niches, were finished with stucco, which rivalled the marble in polish and purity of colour. Around the largest niche, at the end opposite to the entrance, and the arch in which the pulpit stood, were borders of delicate arabesque foliage, into which texts from the Koran, in coloured enamel letters, were skilfully and elegantly interwoven; while above the pulpit itself, in gold letters on a black ground, was the Arabic text, "La Alla, il Alla, Mahomed russool Alla;" "There is no God but one God, and Mahomed is the prophet of God." Two plain cotton carpets, striped red and white, had been placed before the pulpit, to be used by those who might come to the evening prayer.

Outside, the front of the mosque was composed of the dark-coloured basalt used in all the buildings of the city, beautifully finished as to the fitting of the stones, on which bold cornices and rosettes had been executed round the entrance arch, and about the projecting portion which supported the small minarets. Immediately above the archway, broad stone eaves crossed the face of the building, resting upon deep and richly carved brackets of black basalt, surmounted by a bold cornice, over which were fleurs-de-lis, forming the upper ornament. Under the projecting eaves, and on the crest of the entrance arch, were bright flowers in coloured enamel, bordered by frames of delicate white stucco work, which relieved the rich but monotonous tint of the stone, without disturbing the chaste effect of the whole. In the centre of the terrace, before the mosque, was a small fountain, for the purpose of ablution, which threw up a tiny thread of water to some height in the air, descending in a shower of light spray, and producing a faint, plashing sound, very grateful to the ear.

Above the mosque, and mingling with its slender minarets and thin gilded spires, a few cocoa-nut trees waved their graceful pendant leaves; and with them the heavy foliage of the fragrant moulserry, and the broad leaf of the plantain, with its tender yet vivid green, formed an harmonious contrast. Nearer the terrace was a group of orange trees, some weighed down by clusters of golden fruit, others covered with blossom, which, with the tuberoses around the foun-

tain, and the evening jessamine now opening, gave forth to the cool evening air a fragrance almost overpowering. By day, the sun hardly ever reached the mosque, and it always appeared invitingly cool and quiet; but at this evening hour, shadow was rapidly deepening into gloom, adding a solemn effect which enhanced the beauty of this secluded spot.

Two persons stood by the fountain. They had just performed their ablutions, as the last quivering chant of the Muezzin, "La illa, il Ulla," issuing from the tall minaret of one of the neighbouring mosques, floated to them on the soft breeze: yet they appeared to hesitate ere they entered the mosque for the evening prayer. One of them was an elderly woman, clad as befitted the position of the favourite nurse and confidential female servant of a wealthy house, in a blue cotton petticoat of thick but fine texture, over which, and around her body and head, was a white muslin scarf. Her features were homely, yet good-natured, and she evidently regarded her companion,—who merits a fuller description,—with pride mingled with deep affection.

And, in truth, there were few fairer maidens in Beejapoor, even among the wealthy and highborn nobles, than Zyna, the only daughter of Afzool Khan. Her features might be called irregular, according to any European standard, but they were soft and inexpressibly charming; and in her large lustrous eyes, of the deepest brown, there lurked a world of deep feeling which the excitement of life would call into action.

About her rounded chin and small mouth, whose full and bow-shaped lips had somewhat of a voluptuous expression, there played a thousand charms, which, though they might not disclose themselves or be observed while her features were at rest, yet, as her first timid reserve gave place to the excitement of conversation or passing incident, exercised a strange but irresistible fascination over those about her.

She was very fair for her country. Her mother's bright Georgian complexion was but little deepened in her daughter's richer and browner cast of colour; the skin appeared to possess that transparent softness which gave a bewitching charm to the delicate yet decided features; and her cheeks and neck flushed, under any excitement, with a warmth which told of her southern and more excitable temperament. Whenever she spoke, the upper lip was raised higher than usual, disclosing a rosy mouth, with teeth which glistened like pearls, even and small; and from the absence of any ornament in the nostril, it was evident that, as yet, no marriage rite had been performed. Her age might be fourteen, or even less; but her figure, from its rounded proportions and grace, would have induced a presumption that she was older.

Yet it would have been only a passing thought. One look at that innocent, almost childish face—where, though full of bright intelligence, the world had as yet fixed no stamp of care to check the natural joyousness of her spirit—would have dispelled it

instantly; and if the habitual brightness was sometimes dimmed, it was but as the breath upon a mirror —the passing shadow of some gentle disappointment, which enhanced the beauty as it passed away.

There was no mark of rank or wealth about her, except in the solid gold anklets of heavy chainwork she wore, which fitted closely over her high bare instep: a ring of gold hanging loosely about her neck, and a rosary of large pearls usually worn there, but which were now passing rapidly, and apparently mechanically, through her fingers, as if the thoughts that urged them were somewhat agitated. There was, too, a slight knitting of the brow while she idly, and perhaps somewhat impatiently, dabbled with one naked foot in the water which was welling over the rim of the fountain, sending circles of small wavelets over its otherwise unruffled surface, as she looked eagerly to the entrance-door of the garden as if in expectation of some one. As she stood thus upon a step, her foot resting upon the raised rim of the fountain—the vivid scarlet of her satin petticoat, and the white of the fine muslin scarf which, wound about her person, and passed over her head—were reflected in its trembling waters; and, with the mosque and dark trees behind her, and the figure of the old nurse sitting on the step at her feet, a picture was formed such as no man could have looked on without emotion, and admiration of a being so eminently lovely.

"You are my witness, Goolab," she said at length, looking down on the nurse, "that he said he would come to evening prayer, and that I have waited thus long. The time is passing fast, and you know this is the second night he has disappointed me. O that he may not be careless to God's service! He used not to be so. But I am not angry with him, nurse," she continued, looking down to the attendant; and as she spoke, every trace of displeasure, if it had ever existed, disappeared at once before her habitual good humour and sweet smile; "he never disappointed me, that he had not some very good reason for staying away——and yet——"

"Nay, my soul," returned the woman, "the Azân is but just said, and there is yet ample time for prayer; the carpets have not been half spread in the Jumma Mosque yet. Why should you be impatient? But listen, was I not right? My young lord comes, so think him faithless no longer."

As she spoke the door of the garden court opened, and with a cry of joy Zyna sprang to meet her brother, as with rapid steps he traversed the garden, and ascended the low terrace before the mosque.

Still of tender age, Fazil Khan was already a remarkable figure. The down of youth had not yet hardened upon his lip and chin; but his tall athletic frame, and erect and confident carriage, proved him to have been engaged in the actions, if not the strife, of the world. His animated features strongly resembled his sister's, but with a sterner and bolder cast of expres-

sion, while his colour was much darker. A large grey eye, with remarkably long lashes, which he had from his mother, increased their grave, thoughtful, yet tender, and perhaps almost mournful, expression; the same sweet smile as Zyna's played about his mouth as he returned her joyous welcome, while his glistening eye and excited manner proved that something unusual had occurred, not only to delay him, but to cause an emotion he could not well repress.

"Ah, thou art a sad truant, Fazil," said Zyna, as, after their first greeting, he laid aside his sword and shield, loosened his waist-band, and prepared to perform his ablutions; "armed, too, more heavily than usual, while thy face tells me thou hast met with some recent adventure. Thou hast not been in danger . . . . Fazil, my brother!"

"Danger!" echoed the youth; "if to walk the streets of Beejapoor amidst contending factions, where one can hardly tell a friend from an enemy, be danger, why then, dear sister, I have had my share even now. But, trust me, there is no real danger to me. Come then to prayer, for the Azân is said, and the light already fails us."

So saying, they ascended the mosque steps together. Their carpets were already spread, and they at once engaged in the service of the evening, well known to the youth, but in the performance of which, his sister was as yet only his gentle and docile pupil.

It would seem that their appearance, as they de-

scended the steps of the mosque together after the prayer was finished, and came out again upon the terrace by the fountain, had more than ordinarily attracted the nurse's attention, for she advanced, and passing her hands rapidly over them from head to foot, pressed her knuckles against her temples; and as they cracked loudly, ejaculated a fervent wish for a thousand years' life and prosperity to each. Such acts are common to the privileged native servants of India, and old Goolab had been their faithful attendant since they were born, and had carefully watched their growth. Both loved her warmly, and there was nothing either would have grudged, to soothe the declining years of their old favourite.

"Enough, enough, Goolab," cried Fazil, as, after several repetitions of the ceremony we have just mentioned, she stroked his chin with her fingers, and kissed their tips; "what evil do you think has come to me that you take it on yourself?"

"Alas, I know not!" said the nurse sighing; and as she spoke her eyes filled with tears; "but my lord said there had been danger, and I would not have it so. And what evil glances may not have been cast on my beautiful child all through the streets to-day?"

The youth made a slight gesture of impatience, but it was lost on the fond old woman. Checking the feeling which had prompted it, he cried cheerfully, "No, no, Goolab, believe me, I meant no more than

ordinary danger ; are we not always in it? And who can tell the hour of his death?" he added after a pause, and looking reverently upwards ; "or whether it is to come by a bullet or a sword-cut, long wasting fever or sudden sickness ; nay, here as we stand! When the message comes we cannot stay."

"Hush, say not so, brother," said Zyna, gently laying her hand upon his mouth ; "talk not so of death."

"Nay, my rose, he says but the truth," added Goolab ; "and who knew it better, than the pure saint your mother, who sleeps yonder? Well, it was God's will, and who shall gainsay it? Meah* is right, my pet, but death should not be sent to the like of you ; only to the old servant who is ripe for the harvest——"

"We linger," said Fazil to his sister, interrupting her ; "and the darkness is fast spreading. I have much to do ere midnight, and I must go to prepare for it. I will meet thee at the evening meal before I start—— Yet once more to take leave of thee, O mother!" he said to himself; "there may be danger to-night, and if it should be—— Come, Zyna," he resumed, "a few flowers for the tomb, and I must go. Get a light, Goolab—the lamp may as well be lighted now."

"I had placed them before you came, Fazil ; but come ; again may she look down on her children together," said his sister.

* The eldest son of any Mahomedan family is generally called "Meah ;" more especially if they be Pathans.

So saying, she gathered a few jessamine and Moulserry flowers, and, with her brother following, passed to the end of the garden court, where, among some others, stood a high tomb of polished black stone, with a pillar at the back in which was a niche for lamps that were lighted every evening.

Reverently and tenderly were the fresh flowers laid at the head and feet of the tomb by both. One could see no morbid motive in the act, and there were no tears or vain regret. Their creed, imbued as it is with fatalism, had taught them submission, and the offering up of flowers every evening after the Azân, as the lamps were lighted, had become a simple duty, never committed to others. If those two loving and simple hearts believed that their mother's spirit was thus rejoiced, it will account to us for that constant remembrance of the dead which is so affecting, and generally so sincere, among the Mahomedan families of India.

"Come," said Fazil, "we must not delay; though, indeed, O sweet mother! I could stay long with thee to-night," he added, touching the foot of the grave gently, and raising his hand to his head. "I kiss thy feet, O mother! may thy blessing rest upon me. Be not far from us, O beloved! Come, Goolab, give me the lamp, and I will place it myself to-night."

"What ails the boy?" said the nurse to herself, as Fazil advanced with the lamp, lighted the others, and placed it in the niche with the customary prayer. "What ails him to-night? Truly there is danger, and

he has done all those things himself that he may meet her——. If it be the will of Alla, who can gainsay it? but not so, O Protector!" she muttered; "not so. I vow Fatehas* at the mosque next Friday if he is spared," she said inwardly, weeping.

Fazil's errand was done, and as he turned he saw the old nurse wiping her eyes. "Ah, weeping, Goolab?" he said. "No, no, that is of no use now."

"No, Meah, truly of no use," she replied; "but memory is often too much for me when I think upon her. Yet I will not weep—of what use would it be?"

"None, old nurse, none; come, get me my dinner, for I have much to do ere midnight."

"Will our father join us?" asked Zyna.

"I think not; I left him engaged with affairs of importance with the king's secretary in the Durbar, and he did not speak of return. I will wait a little for him, but should I not see him, thou must tell him, Zyna, that I am gone on the king's business. But hurry the dinner; I go only to give a few orders, and I will be with thee presently."

So saying he left them, and quitted the garden by another door which led to the outer court, where the guard-houses allotted to the retainers of his father's house were situated. Goolab followed to bar the door after him, which was kept closed on the inside, and, returning to Zyna, said, "Did he tell thee what he was going to do, my life?"

"No," said Zyna sadly; "he would not tell me,

* Thank-offerings.

nurse, and I dared not ask him. He said he would explain all by-and-by, and he will. I know he will," she added, clapping her hands; "he always trusts me."

"I only hope he is in none of these plots that they say are going on," returned the nurse.

"What plots, Goolab?" asked Zyna with apprehension.

"O, I know not," replied the old woman, with a puzzled air, and passing her hand across her eyes; "only people in the Bazar say so; and the Bangle woman, after she had put on your new set the other day, said something about the Mahrattas and Sivaji Bhóslay."

"Oh, the Kafirs!"* cried Zyna, laughing; "I have no fear for them, if that is all. I was afraid of worse. But come, or we shall keep him waiting."

* Unbelievers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Entering another small court, in which there was a stone porch formed of pillars connected by arches, supporting a dome in the shape of half an octagon, projecting from a side-wall, which served as a private place of audience—Fazil passed through a farther door into one of the large exterior courts of the mansion, which contained an open hall composed of a triple row of pointed arches covering a large space. Generally, it was filled with the better classes of horse-soldiers ; Silladars, or cavaliers who rode their own horses and sat there when not on duty ; also by the officers and men of the young Khan's own guard : and occasionally was used by his father when were held great ceremonies, festivals, or rejoicings in the house.

On the three other sides of the court were arches or cloisters, slightly raised from the ground, in which lounged or slept soldiers of all classes, on duty or otherwise, generally collected into groups, playing at

chess, or pacheese,* or cards, singing, or telling stories. Just then, however, most were idle; for the lamps, which stood in niches in the centre of each arch, had not been lighted. The large hall was nearly empty; but in one corner a group of Karkoons, or clerks, sat with a large brass lamp in the midst of them, occupied with accounts, and making fair copies of letters to be despatched by that night's post.

All the men assembled here were strictly the retainers of the house; for the guard of troops belonging to the King had another post in a different court, and were comparatively few in number. Afzool Khan's household force, or Päègah, as it was called, was supported out of royal estates, granted or assigned for the purpose. It belonged strictly to the royal service, but the men looked to their own lord for employment and maintenance, followed him to the field, and were for the most part hereditary retainers, with no claim upon, or expectation from, royal favour. Such was the condition and constitution of the greater portion of native armies at the period of our tale, and such it continues to be in native states where troops are maintained.

Fazil Khan was the idol of his men, both Moslems and Hindus. His martial exercises had begun early, and he had proved an apt scholar. Any of the men who particularly excelled in the use of a particular weapon had, in turn, the young noble for his pupil;

* Twenty-five, a game played with cowries and men, not unlike backgammon.

and in all field accomplishments necessary to the soldier and gentleman of those days, the young Khan was well skilled. No doubt these, and his daily systematic exercises, had developed a frame always strongly knit; and his broad deep chest, round muscular arms, and thin flanks, amply testified strength and activity.

On horseback with the Mahratta spear or matchlock, it was no hyperbole to say that, at full gallop, he could pick up a tent-peg driven into the ground with the former, or shatter one at a fair distance with a bullet from the other. Such martial accomplishments never fail to gain the respect and attachment of an inferior soldiery; and when to these were added a disposition open and cheerful, somewhat hasty perhaps at times, but in reality generous and affectionate, — a hearty frank manner, which few could resist, and a countenance, not strictly handsome, but which expressed all this and even more,—it will not be thought strange, that the young Khan should have become a universal favourite with his retainers, and the especial darling and idol of a few.

Chief, perhaps, among the latter, was Bulwunt Rao Bhóslay, who held rank in the Päigah as Duffadar, or leader of a small "duffa," or subdivision of men. He was a Mahratta of good, nay, originally noble family—a Silladar, or cavalier who maintained not only his own horse but five others, with which, mounted by dependants of his own, he had originally

visited the capital and joined the service of Afzool Khan.

Him, had the young Khan selected as his especial instructor in the use of the sword; for at the annual festivals and games before the king's palace, Bulwunt Rao's feats of slicing betel-nut on the ground, cutting a lime in two on the palm of a man's hand, or a ripe guava on his head, were unrivalled; and their yearly repetition was looked for by the people with great interest, and always rewarded by hearty acclamations.

Bulwunt Rao was worthy of his young lord's confidence. Daring and resolute, he had already led Fazil Khan into the midst of some sharp cavalry affairs with the Moguls, and brought him forth safe, while he himself had been wounded several times in protecting him from sword-cuts. Wily, yet full of energy, if there were any necessity for action, open and frank in his manner, he had early won his young lord's affectionate regard, which he very heartily returned, while he rejoiced, with all a soldier's pride, to see him growing up as manly and true of heart as his boyhood had promised.

Fazil's arrival among those assembled—so suddenly, and at an hour when he usually withdrew to the Zenana and his studies — caused no little excitement among the men, and they eagerly crowded round him for the news which he might have to tell them.

"What tidings hast thou for us, Meah Sahib?" cried a fine bearded fellow of his own tribe of Pathans,

also a favourite. "May thy prestige increase! but there should be something by thy look,—a march against those Zenana dogs of Moguls, or a fray over the border against Golconda."

"A hunt of Moguls!" echoed several. "What better sport, Meah? There are some pickings of Delhi gold to be got in their waistbands and pockets."

"And what has my lord for his servants to perform?" asked Bulwunt Rao, now advancing with his usual easy yet deferential manner. "Speak but the word, and we are in our saddles directly. Shall I order the Nagara* to be beaten, and cry to horse!"

"Not so, Bulwunt," said the young man, taking him aside; "what I have to say is for your ear alone. Come into the private court and listen."

"For me alone, Meah?" returned Bulwunt Rao, laughing. "What brawl have you fallen into? whom have you slain to-day, sir?"

"Let us all follow if ye are going out," cried several others; "don't leave us behind."

"We have had nothing to do for a month," added one.

"And our swords have lost their edges, Meah," shouted several.

"Peace, all of ye," exclaimed the young Khan; "let no one follow us. This is no fighting matter. Am I wont to plunge into street brawls, Bulwunt Rao?"

* Large kettle-drum attached to each risala, regiment or troop of horse.

"We were none of us with you, my lord, to-day," cried several, "and it is not safe for you to be alone in the streets in these times."

"I had others of the king's, and was quite safe," returned Fazil; "but come, Bulwunt, if you are fit to listen to me; I only fear that Ganja* pipe of yours is at fault, and your brain is hardly clear. If not, I had as well hold my tongue; yet I had rather trust you, old friend," he continued seriously, "than any other."

Fazil's altered tone and manner had their effect upon his companion. "Wait for a moment, Meah," he said, "I will join you instantly;" and so saying, he ran quickly back to the spot where he had left his carpet, seized a brass vessel of cool water, poured some into his hand and dashed it upon his face, then swallowed several rapid and deep gulps, and returned. "Now, I am fit to listen to the words of the holy Krishna himself if he were on earth; therefore speak on, Meah Sahib, and behold your servant ready to think for you, or to fight for you, as you please!"

"Ay, there is some soberness about you now, Bulwunt," said the young man; "less redness about the eyes, and they are looking straight out of your head, instead of rolling about in it. Now, can I trust you not to prate of this matter before the people yonder, or over the Ganja pipe——"

"Nay, Meah, be merciful, and pardon me for

* The dried leaves of the hemp plant, which cause intoxication if smoked.

once," said Bulwunt, closing his hands and putting them up to his forehead; "the Ganja has grown on me, but not to the discredit of my faithfulness, Meah; and when I smoke I never talk. Now, say on, I will be silent as death."

Fazil proceeded some paces through the court without replying to his retainer, and tried the garden door, but it was fastened inside. "We must be content here," he said. "Go, shut the door, we shall at least be safe from interruption."

"In the name of all the gods, Meah," said Bulwunt Rao, as he returned and sat down on the step of the porch beside Fazil, "what hast thou to say to me? Why all this need of caution? Has the Wuzeer revolted, or what?"

"Silence," returned Fazil, "hear me. In one word, you are a Mahratta—is Tannajee Maloosray known to you?"

The question seemed for an instant to stun the faculties of the hearer. He passed his hand dreamily across his forehead and eyes, and, pausing, seemed to gasp. Fazil thought it might be a sudden dizziness—the consequence of the strong narcotic he had been smoking—and was about to ask him, when Bulwunt Rao spoke.

"Tannajee Maloosray! Meah? Do I know Maloosray? Ay, truly, Khan; as the wild dog and the wolf, as the wild boar and the tiger know each other, so do I know Tannajee Maloosray. The destroyer of my house, the usurper of my possessions, the

plunderer of my ancestral wealth. Yes, there is a feud between us which can be washed out only by blood. Listen, Meah," continued Bulwunt Rao, and he got up and walked rapidly to and fro: "hast thou time to hear a short story about Tannajee?"

"Yes, speak on. I am listening."

"I was a youth," continued Bulwunt, "younger than you are by several years, when Maloosray aimed his blow at my family. My father was dead: had he lived, Tannajee dared not have done it. My uncle, Govind Rao, was a timid man, looking only to the farms and to money-making while he lived. At last he died also. But he left another brother, Ramdeo, whom we loved much, and he took care of us all. My younger brother, Seeta Ram—why speak of him, Meah, he would have been as beautiful as thou art—and some of the women and myself, all lived together in the old house. They came at midnight, Tannajee and a band of his Mawullees. I do not remember much, Meah; but look here;" and he took off his turban and showed a deep scar on his shaved head. "That is what I fell from, under a blow of his sword. I don't think," he continued dreamily, "that I have been quite right in my brain since, but it does not matter.

"Next morning there were seven stark corpses in the house, and great pools of blood. My uncle, my grandmother, two servants—how can I say it? yes—my mother and my little brother, and my mother's sister, who was a widow. One blow of a sword had

killed my brother and my mother. He was in her arms, and had clung to her. Enough; who could have done this but Maloosray? There is not a sword in all Maharastra which could have struck such a blow as that was—but Maloosray's.

"When I recovered consciousness in the morning, the women that remained, and some servants, were wailing over the dead, but they were barely alive from terror. Neighbours however came in, and some of our tenants and servants, and the place was cleaned up. In the evening there were seven piles made near the river for the seven corpses, and they were burned. My wound had been sewn up by the barber, and I was carried to perform the last ceremonies, and I then swore upon their ashes to revenge them, and I will yet do it. Now, by thy father's salt, tell me what thou knowest of that villain Maloosray, and how his name comes into thy mouth?"

"And was nothing done for justice, Bulwunt? Was justice dead in that country?" asked Fazil, deeply interested.

"Justice!" echoed Bulwunt Rao, "justice! Ah, Meah, what can the poor do for justice? All the wealth of the house had been plundered. Maloosray had brought a hundred of his brethren in that Durora,* and he had promised them the plunder. His object was my life, but the gods spared it, and I came here to serve the King, till—till Tannajee is dead, or till I kill him, Meah! That is the only justice I want:

* Gang-robbery, or Dacoity.

that, and the land he took from me. I thought to tell thee all some day, and now I have said it; but, by thy soul, tell me how Maloosray's name is known to thee, and why?"

"Should you know him again, Bulwunt, if you saw him?" asked Fazil.

"Know him, Meah—among a thousand—among a thousand. It is years since we met; but, before that quarrel with my father about the land, he came to us often, for he was my mother's relative. He hunted large game on our hills, when I went with him, and I was a great favourite of his. Most of the sword-play I know, he taught me. Know him? Yes. That night I, a stripling, crossed swords with him. I had wounded one of his men, and he heard the cry. He had been seeking for me. What could I do, Meah, a weak boy, among a crowd of screaming women? Yet I crossed swords with him; and there are few alive who would dare to do so. Forget him? No, I should know him among a thousand. His eyes, Meah, his eyes! Hast thou seen them?"

"Nay, I have not seen them yet, Bulwunt; but I think I know where he is to be found," returned Fazil.

"Here, Meah? in Beejapoor? Tannajee Maloosray in the city?"

"Yes, here, you are always rambling about the city at night, and know all the Mudud Khanas;* canst thou guide me to one Rama's shop—Rama of

* Shops where narcotics are sold and smoked.

Ashtee? It is in the great Kullal's * Bazar, and near a Hindu temple."

"I know it, Meah; I know it well. Rama sells the best Ganja in Beejapoor. Yes, I can take you there, but not in those clothes."

"Not now. Let the night wear on a little; they will not be there till just before midnight," replied Fazil; "and we have to watch the temple, too. Is there one near Rama's, with trees about it? Some people meet there first, and then go to Rama's."

"Yes, Meah, there is the temple of Dévi,† in the plain beyond, among the tamarind trees; a lonely place it is, and Byragees put up there. Yes, I know it."

"Then I am right," continued Fazil, "for I saw it myself to-day. Now, as Maloosray is desperate, should we not take some picked men with us? There is Raheem Khan, and——"

"Men?—to take Maloosray?" cried Bulwunt. "O Meah, you are simple to think it. Maloosray will have twenty, aye fifty, spies out, and old Rama is chief of them. One soldier a cose off, and Tannajee would be warned. But why go, Meah?" he continued, after a pause. "I will take my own men and bring him. "Oh," cried Bulwunt, speaking through his teeth and to himself, "for one good chance and a fair field with him now!"

"No, Bulwunt, I must go; it is the King's business," returned Fazil; "besides Persian may be spoken, and you do not understand it."

* Publican. † Bhowani, or Kali.

"Persian, my lord? then this is a Mogul affair?"

"I cannot say, friend," returned Fazil; "all I have discovered is, that Maloosray will be in the temple, or in the Mudut Khana, and a 'Lalla.' There is no good, I am sure, at the bottom of it, and we must find out what it is. We know the Mogul emissaries are busy, and it is important to check their plots."

"And Sivaji Bhóslay's also, Meah, they bode no good; for my people write to me that he and Tannajee have leagued together, and——; in short, they write foolish things, sir."

"Bhóslay? that is your family name, Bulwunt," said Fazil, musing.

"Yes," he replied, "and we are of the same house; but he is rich and I am poor. And now people tell wonderful things of him; how the Mother—that is, Bhowani, speaks in him sometimes, and he prophesies great events. One thing is certain, Meah, Sivaji Bhóslay is no friend to Beejapoor, nor to any Moosulman; and if Maloosray has come here for him, it is with some object which is worth the risk to discover."

"Then they are friends?" asked Fazil.

"Ay, Meah, as thou and I, and nearer still. Maloosray believes Sivaji to be an incarnation of the gods, and would give his life for him. So, too, many another; and the people have begun to write ballads about him, which are sung in Beejapoor even sometimes, and they set one's blood dancing. No wonder

the people of the wild valleys love them; wild places, Meah, which ye know little of as yet."

"Yes, it is worth the risk to find out what is doing. One thread of those dark intrigues in my hand and I am not my father's son if I do not discover more," replied Fazil; "but you said we should be disguised."

The Mahratta thought for a moment. "What sayest thou, Meah, to becoming a Hindu for the time? I could paint the marks on thy forehead. Nay," he continued, as he saw the young man shrink from the idea, "they will only be very temporary 'abominations,' as the old Khan calls them, and water will remove them when we return."

"Good," returned Fazil. "I will suffer 'the abominations' in the cause of the Shah and the faith. And, now, begone. I will come to thee here, after the evening meal, and we can dress unobserved. But swear on my neck, Bulwunt, no more Ganja to-night."

"No, no, Meah," returned the man, laughing, and touching his young lord's neck and feet; "I swear I will not touch it. We both need cool heads for this work, and I will not fail you."

"Then go," added Fazil. "I will send Goolab to you when I am ready."

CHAPTER XIX.

Fazil was as good as his word to his fair sister, and having seen Bulwunt depart, gained the door which led to the private apartments, and proceeded to that in which he knew he should find her.

The room was upon the first story, which, by means of deep stone brackets, had been constructed so as to project somewhat over the rooms beneath. It contained, indeed for the most part consisted of, three large oriel windows, overhanging the line of the walls, so that they commanded a view up and down the main street, which led to Toorweh and the royal palaces. These windows were large enough for several persons to sit in and enjoy the air; and the floor of the centre one, which was the largest, was raised a step above that of the room, so as to form a dais, on which a thickly-quilted cotton mattress, covered with clean white muslin, was laid every day, and furnished with large pillows, so that those sitting there could recline luxuriously, if they pleased. Between the stone mullions of the windows, carved screens or shutters of wood had been inserted, which

were fixtures, except a portion in the centre which opened on hinges. Without them were heavy wooden shutters, lined with iron, with openings to fire from should it be needed.

The other windows did not project so far, and were in fact single arches, filled deep with carved lattice-work, closed during the day, but open in the evening to admit the fresh air. Beside each was a large Persian carpet and a pillow. The floor of the apartment had also a thin carpet of quilted cotton cloth, covered with white muslin; and the perfect neatness of the whole, the walls being pure white without ornament, gave evidence of very vigilant superintendence by the Khan's present wife, perhaps by Zyna herself. One lamp burned in a corner, and, being agitated by the wind, which blew freely through the apartment, gave a flickering light, which left much of the space in actual gloom.

Zyna had been there some time, and the sweet freshness of the evening air had tempted her to throw open the lattice window to admit it more freely, as she sat in the balcony or oriel window already mentioned. Looking out upon what was passing below her, she did not observe her brother's entrance, and almost started as he spoke.

"I did not hear thee, brother," she said, rising and making way for him. "Come and sit here, it is so fresh after the rain. What kept thee so late? We hear the Durbar was very full to-day, and that there are more rumours of war. O, I pray not, brother?"

"True, sister, there are such rumours," he replied; "but nothing new. The Wuzeer is at Nuldroog with the army. The Emperor's forces lie about Dowlutabad, so there is no change. But I was not in Durbar. I was looking after some other matters. Come and sit here, Zyna, and I will tell thee. See," he continued, as she seated herself by him, "the city looks calm and beautiful, does it not? Yet, who can tell the wild acts now in progress there, and the wild plots which disgrace it?"

In truth it was a fair scene. The house or palace of Afzool Khan stood somewhat apart from other buildings, upon a slight eminence, and the room they were in overlooked a large portion of the city to the south, west, and north. Between the combined twilight and light of a moon about half-full, the outlines of the city generally, and of some of the most remarkable buildings, could be seen distinctly, and formed a picture of great beauty. To the north, the large dome of the Mausoleum of Mahmoud Adil Shah stood out boldly against the clear grey sky, as well as the high dark masses of the King's palaces in the citadel, and of that of the "Seven Stories" in particular, in the windows of which lights already twinkled here and there, and disappeared.

A little on the left of the palace was the massive cavalier of the "Oopree Boorje," with the King's flagstaff on its summit; below, the dark lines of the fortifications, with lights gleaming from each guardroom upon the bastions. Thence the eye travelled

round the city, resting here and there upon massive domes and slender minarets, shining tenderly in the moon's rays, which also fell softly upon the outlines of terraced houses and palaces, and upon the dark masses of foliage of their gardens. Over the most populous parts of the city also nearer to them, the evening smoke hovered like a thin mist, catching reflection of the thousand lights and fires beneath: and a hum of voices arose from thence:—otherwise, all was still around them, and the broad street leading to Toorweh nearly deserted. Night was fast falling, and a bright star here and there already sparkled in the sky.

"Yes, it is a fair scene, sister," he continued, as she drew closer to him. "Yet, even now, men are plotting villany and treachery. There is no peace in it."

"No peace, brother!" she said, echoing his words; "cannot others be as we are—enjoying what Alla sends them without strife? Why should it not be so?"

"Why, Zyna? because of ambition, which, with the hot thirst it begets, dries up men's hearts; because of avarice, driving them to barter kingdoms and honour for gold; because of fraud, and deceit, and lies, and profligacy. Alas, girl, where ends the catalogue? Even now I fear the evil thoughts and treacherous plots of our fair city."

Zyna shuddered, and nestled closer to her brother. "Why is thy speech so sad to-night, Fazil?" she

said timidly; "does ought threaten us or our friends?"

"Listen, sister, and judge," he returned. "I cannot help these fancies. Ah, Zyna! if I had one like thee to be with me always—to be more to me even than thou art—perhaps the world, fair as it lies there, would have few charms for me."

"She would be forgotten before a bright sword or a gallant horse, brother," replied Zyna, in a tone of raillery.

"Not so, by the Prophet!—by your head and eyes; no, Zyna," cried her brother earnestly. "Let such an one come, and thou wilt see what she would be to me."

"Would it were so, brother! and yet I know of no one—not one as yet—whom thou couldst love like me. None of the maidens of this city are worthy of thee; no, not one, Fazil."

"Ah! nothing less than one of the blessed houris of Paradise would content thee for me," returned the young man, laughing; "but one like thyself would quite content me, sister. Perhaps even now thou hast been thinking I have some love-secret to tell thee, for I have not accounted for my delay these two evenings, but love there is none, dearest. No—none at all," as she shook her head and laughed incredulously,—"none. A graver matter, truly, if I am right. Listen, Zyna, I have told thee of Kowas Khan before—my friend the Wuzeer's son——"

"What of him?" she returned, so abruptly that

her tone of alarm startled her brother. "Yes," she continued, correcting herself, "surely—often—dear brother, hast thou not told me of his bravery when the Moguls besieged the city? but do not mention him, else I will go away."

"Nay, go not, Zyna. I will not tease thee," he replied, "yet why should I not speak of him? Is he not a hero—a very Roostum? Is he not beautiful? —a youth for a maiden to love, or a man to make his friend! But enough of this," for he perceived the confusion his last words had occasioned: "to say the truth, I am anxious for the whole family, and there is much cause to fear; the Wuzeer is not keeping his faith with the King. But for that, indeed——"

"Hush, brother!" said Zyna, again blushing, for she knew that she had been sought in marriage by the Wuzeer for his son; "may God forbid evil to him or any of them; and men have as yet spoken well of him. Why should he be suspected?"

"Alas, who can say?" replied her brother sadly. "Who can tell to what crimes pride and ambition may not urge a man? Truly, sister, it will not be marvellous if the Wuzeer, seeing the danger of the Moguls on the one hand, of Sivaji Bhóslay on the other, and knowing better than we do the divisions among our own nobles, should forget his faith, and try to strike in for himself. 'Twas thus, so writes the historian of honoured memory, Mahomed Kasim Ferishta, that our own kingly house rose into exist-

ence, and the Nizam Shahy and Kootub Shahy dynasties also; what wonder, then, that Khan Mahomed — the rich, the honoured, the powerful — should be tempted to follow examples so successful and so prosperous?"

"What! and forget his King, who has raised him from—from——" she could not add slavery; "forget honours, titles, lands, wealth? O brother!"

"Ah, Zyna," returned Fazil, sighing, "believe me, there are few minds so noble, and so humble too, as to despise power in little things; how much less a position so exalted as that of monarch of these noble realms. Men have already forgotten 'Rehan' the slave, in 'Khan Mahomed,' the Wuzeer of Beejapoor. We know what he was, we see what he is, and we can think what he might be. If he is playing for the highest stake, it is a game in which his life is of no account."

"I would I had not known of this, brother, from thy lips," said Zyna sadly. "True, it seems to have a terrible distinctness: and his son?"

"Nay, by your head and eyes, he is pure, Zyna. My own dear friend," he exclaimed, "I would answer for him with my life. As for the rest, 'tis but suspicion as yet. Whatever the matter I know of may lead to, I am resolved to see the last of it. Listen.

"Last evening I was coming from the Durbar, and, dismissing the men who were with me, I rode to some open ground to exercise my horse. It is not

far from the King's palace at Toorweh: and to get there, I proceeded through the outskirts of the city, which lead to the quarter of the lower orders of the people. I had not ridden far when I met the palankeen of the King's secretary, attended by some horsemen. It seemed strange to meet him there, because, when I left the audience hall, he seemed immersed in business. So I rode up towards it with the intention of saluting him again, when he shut the door as it were carelessly, but, as I thought, with an evident desire not to be seen: this stimulated my curiosity. I had no pretence for following him, only there happened to be an acquaintance, who was in command of his escort, and who called me. I joined him, unobserved by the Meerza, and accompanied him under pretence of friendly chat. By-and-by, as the better part of the town grew more distant, I asked him banteringly what had brought so great a person as the King's Meerza into so mean a quarter, and whether I might see the end of the adventure; and looking about him, —to be sure the rest of the escort were out of hearing —he told me that, after leaving the court, the Meerza had first gone to a respectable Hindu house in another quarter and remained there some time; and when he came out he was attended to the door by a Hindu soldier, who bade him depart, and told him not to forget the shop of Rama of Ashtee, in the 'Kullal's' quarter, and Tannajee Maloosray. Thence a man was sent as guide to another house, and he showed him to me then running with the bearers

before the palankeen. 'So I can only suppose it is some work of the King's,' added my friend, 'with which we cavaliers have nothing to do.' I thought otherwise, for Tannajee's name is famous; and we rode on.

"After some time the guide stopped at the door of a decent house, which, I think, was a Jungum's* Mutt. The Meerza did not get out of his palankeen, and a man came to the doorway and began to speak in Persian, after having looked round suspiciously at all of us. I shall not forget the man, Zyna, for he had piercing grey eyes and a hooked nose. I suppose he thought no one could understand him, for he did not speak low. Still, as his head was partly inside the door of the secretary's palankeen, I could not hear all, and could only approach indeed, on pretence of my horse being restless. I heard, however, the man's direction to the secretary, a Hindu temple of Bhowani, in the plain on the east of the fort, where papers were to be shown at midnight, and the Wuzeer's name was mentioned. Thither I will go, 'Inshalla!'† to-night. I can disguise myself, and my speech is Mahratta or Canarese, as I please, and Bulwunt Rao goes with me."

"Go not, my precious brother," said Zyna, interrupting him; "there must be danger among these plotters. Remember what thou art to us all, Fazil."

"If my love were not what it is for Khan Mahomed's

* Priests of the Lingayet caste of Hindus.

† *Inshalla!*—"Please God."

son," he replied, "I would not hazard this matter; but we, thy father and myself, owe the Wuzeer many favours, and I should hold myself false did I hesitate to peril something in their cause. Even thou, Zyna, hast not forgotten how Kowas Khan and our brave Bulwunt Rao fought over me when I had been stricken down in the Friday's fight with the Moguls, and but for them I had perished. Yes, sister, I must go."

"Go? whither son?" said Afzool Khan, whose entrance had not been observed by either; "whither wouldst thou go, and for what?"

"Father!" uttered both at the same moment, and, rising, saluted him reverently.

"Be seated, my children," he said; "I too will join you. Your mother hath not been here?"

The allusion made was to their father's second wife, whom he had married after the mother of his children died, and who received from them all the honour and respect, if not the tender love, of their real mother. Her name was Lurlee, to which her title of Khánum being added, she was known among her friends and dependants as Lurlee Khánum; and she will appear presently in her proper person.

"No, father," replied Zyna, "she was going to cook something for you, and had something to do with her tables; and said that there was something going to happen, for that Mars and the moon, or stay—— really I don't know, father, how it was—I forget."

"Ah," returned her father, smiling, "bicharee—

poor thing!—those stars are a sad trouble to her. But what art thou going to do, son?"

"Tell him all you have told me, brother," said Zyna.

Fazil recapitulated what he had told his sister, and finding his father interested, again stated his intention of following up the secret whatever it might be.

"Go, my son," said the old Khan, "I cannot gainsay thee in this matter. If we can protect Khan Mahomed or keep evil from his house, or if any of these vile plots can be traced to those concerned in them, a few sharp examples may deter others. But why not take some of the Paigah? those are dangerous quarters by night."

"Impossible, father, they are too wary; and Bulwunt Rao says there will be spies and scouts watching everywhere. So we are better alone, and with your leave, father, I go to prepare myself."

Afzool Khan opened the casement, and looked out. He partly leaned out of the window, and appeared to be gazing abstractedly over the city. The young moon was now low in the sky, and the stars shone out more brilliantly than before; but clouds were gathering fast in the south-west, which, from the lightning flashing about their tops, boded a storm. As yet, however, the gentle light of the moon pervaded all, glinting from the bright gilded pinnacles of domes and minarets, and resting tenderly upon the white terraces, walls, and projecting oriels of houses

near him—upon the tapering minarets of his own private mosque, and the heavy but graceful foliage that hung about them.

"It is a type of what is coming," thought the Khan —"here the moonlight only partially dispelling the gloom, which will increase; there heavy night-clouds already threatening. Even so with our fair kingdom: the tempest of sorrow may break over us. We cannot stop it, but we may at least endure the trial, and be true to our salt."

He was long silent, and the beads which he had removed from his wrist were passing rapidly through his fingers, while his lips moved as though in prayer. Zyna dared not speak, yet he looked at her lovingly as his lips still moved, and passing his arm round her, drew her to him. Perhaps with that embrace more tender thoughts came into his heart, some memories that were sad yet grateful.

"There will be no danger, Zyna," he said assuringly, as he felt her trembling, and guessed her thoughts; "Fazil and Bulwunt Rao are both wary. The moon, too, is setting, and it will be dark, perhaps raining. He comes, daughter," continued the Khan, as Fazil's foot was heard on the stairs; "let us look at him."

As he spoke, Fazil entered the room and made the Hindu salutation of reverence to his father. "Should I be known as your son, father?" he asked.

"Nemmo Narrayen* Baba," cried Afzool Khan, laughing, and returning the salutation in the same

* The Hindu style of salutation to a Gosai.

style. "If thou knowest thyself, it is more than I can say of thee."

The disguise was indeed perfect. Fazil was naked to the waist, and a coarse cloth of some length, which might serve as a sheet if unwound, was crossed upon his shoulders and chest in thick folds. A long scarf of thick soft muslin was tied about his loins, leaving his muscular arms bare and free. On his chest and about his neck was a necklace, consisting of several heavy rows of large wooden beads, which, with the cloth, might turn a sword-cut, while both served to protect him from the damp night wind. About his head was a turban of coarse cloth, and a strip of finer material, passing under his chin, covered his mouth and eyes, and was tied in a knot above his turban, leaving two hood ends hanging down on each side. His face was smeared with white earth, and above his nose the broad trident of Krishna was painted in white and red, covering nearly the whole of his eyebrows and forehead. The loose Mahomedan drawers had been changed for a Hindu waistcloth, or "punja," tied tightly about him, and reaching barely to his knee; while the ends were rolled up, leaving his legs and most part of his thighs bare, which, with his arms, were covered with brown earth to subdue the fairness of his skin. The whole of his clothes were of one colour, a deep reddish brown, which is called "bhugwa," and is the sacred and distinctive colour of all religious devotees. At his back hung a broad black shield with steel bosses upon it, and he

held in his hand a sabre with a plain steel hilt and black scabbard, which his father recognised as a favourite weapon. Nothing could have been better suited for his guise than the whole equipment, nor was there anything left to desire in its perfect adaptation to resistance or flight, should either be necessary.

"Bulwunt waits for me in the garden, and I go. Thy blessing, my father," said Fazil, stooping forward.

"Go. May Alla, and the saints, and the holy Emaon Zamin protect thee!" said the Khan, rising, and placing his hands tenderly on his son's head. "Go, and return victorious!"

"Ameen! ameen!" (amen!) sighed Zyna, for her heart was with her brother as he turned to depart upon his perhaps perilous mission.

CHAPTER XX.

"You have not stayed long, Meah, after all," cried the cheery voice of Bulwunt Rao, as he saw his young master approaching the place of meeting, a large peepal tree, which stood at a back entrance to the garden. "And you are as good as your word. I thought there might be some lecture from 'the Mastu,' and some remonstrances from the Khanum, and possibly that the stars were not to be overcome; but all seems to have gone well. Did they know you?"

"My sister seemed rather frightened as she saw me, and shrank back, but my father declared me perfect, and bade me God-speed," replied Fazil; "but look over me once more: dark as it is, it might be a matter of life or death if we were discovered."

"Discovered, Meah! No, trust me for that!" replied Bulwunt. "Only keep that courtly tongue of yours quiet, or if you speak at all, let it be in Canara, which somehow suits you better than our soft Mahratta, and let it be as broad as you can make it. Leave the rest to me. 'Mahrattas know Mahrattas,' is one of

our common proverbs, not untrue either. No salaams, Meah! If there be occasion to salute any one, you know the mode. So—join your hands and thumbs together, carry them up to your nose. There, your thumbs along the nose—good. Now a gentle inclination of the head, very little——Shabash! that was excellent. Take care that no Bundagee or Salaam Alyèk—or other Moslem salutation escape you: if you have need, a soft 'Numuscar Maharaj,' or if we meet a Gosai, 'Nemmo Narayen Bawa!' Or, better than all—why risk anything? keep a silent tongue, and leave me to talk."

"Nay, not so fast, friend," cried the young Khan, smiling at his follower's earnestness, "fear not for me; I know enough of the customs of the dress I wear to bear me out if need be, and I would fain have my tongue as my hands are—at liberty. No Ganja, I hope, since your brain is clear."

"By your head and eyes, no, Meah, I have only drunk water since you first called me," he replied earnestly; "look here," and he executed one of the most difficult of the movements which accompanied his sword exercise,—"will that do?"

"Let us on then, friend, in the name of all the saints, for we have enough to do ere morning, and it is some distance to the temple."

"Nearly a coss,* Meah, and we have to pass some bad places beyond the deer park. Come, let nothing induce you to enter into a brawl, or notice insult, or

* Two miles.

we shall fail. If we are attacked, we can strike in return. Come!"

So saying, they moved on rapidly and silently to the Hindu temple which Bulwunt Rao knew of. Their appearance—for both were attired as nearly as possible alike, except that Bulwunt had concealed more of his face than his companion—was too common and unobtrusive to attract attention, and they passed unnoticed through the respectable portions of the city, meeting, however, few passers in the now dark and deserted streets.

Passing the wall of the deer park, and skirting the walls and glacis of the citadel, patches of open rocky ground succeeded, where a few sleepless asses picked up a scanty night meal, and the houseless dogs of the city snarled and fought over the carrion carcasses of cattle, or the offal which had been thrown out there, or disputed their half-picked bones with troops of jackals. Now they met men at intervals, who, with muffled faces and scarcely concealed weapons, watched for unwary single passengers, from whom by threat or violence they might be able to extort the means of temporary debauchery. Some such looked scowlingly upon the friends, and sometimes even advanced upon them; but seeing at a nearer glance no hope of anything but hard blows, passed them by unheeded.

"Many a good fellow has had an end of him made hereabouts," said Bulwunt in a low voice as they passed a more conspicuous group than usual, who seemed inclined to dispute the way with them.

"How much would there be found of a man by morning, to ascertain what he had been in life, if his body were thrown upon one of those heaps of carrion, which the hyenas, dogs, and jackals are fighting over? Do you not hear them yelling?—Bah! that would be an ugly fate, and that is why I seldom venture into this quarter by night."

"Then you come sometimes?"

"Why not, Meah? Are there not adventures enough for those who seek them? I tell thee, many a young noble, ay, and old one too, that I could name, come here after dark and amuse themselves gaily for an hour or two; but thou art not of that sort, Meah; else I had brought thee long ago."

"And that is the quarter yonder, I suppose," said the young man, "above which the light gleams brightly."

"You are right, Meah; a few minutes more and we enter it."

A scene it was of coarse open profligacy. Shops of a low character for the sale of spirits were everywhere open, filled with flaring lamps, or before which stood large iron cressets filled with cotton seed soaked in oil, that burned brightly, sending forth a thick ropy smoke, and showing groups of men, women, and children too, sitting on the ground, drinking the hot new liquor, or the more rapidly intoxicating juice of the date palm-tree; which, contained in large earthen jars, was being dispensed by ladlesful to people clustered around them. All this part re-

sounded with obscene abuse, and songs, and violent wrangling. In one group two men had drawn their daggers, and were with difficulty held back by women hanging about them. In another place, two women had hold of each other's hair, and were beating and scratching each other with their disengaged hands.

They passed through all; many a gibe and coarse invitation familiar to Bulwunt Rao, who, had he been alone, could not have resisted them, followed them from men and women. But he was for the time steady, checked by the presence of his young chief, and with the fierce desire of meeting his hereditary enemy burning at his heart. They were now near the place in regard to which Bulwunt thought he could not be mistaken. A little further there was a Hindu temple gaily decked out with white and orange-coloured banners; people were singing evening hymns within it, and their voices rose even above the hoarse murmur of the crowd, and there was a clash of cymbals accompanying them. Bulwunt stopped, and laid his hand on his companion's arm.

"That is the temple," he said, "by which I know the kullals,* and that it is where we shall meet Tannajee, if at all. That is Rama of Ashtee's shop across the street."

"And is the other temple far off?" asked Fazil.

"Not now; a few more turns down the back lanes yonder, and we shall find it among the tamarind trees in the plain. We will go there at once."

* Publican.

Bulwunt knew the place perfectly. A quiet secluded spot, where often, stupid from the effects of ganja, or drink, he had gone to sleep off the effects before he went home. A place where one or two Jogis, or Gosais, or Sunniasis of ascetic orders, usually put up, or travellers sometimes going eastwards, who had to be clear of the city before dawn. The grove, too, was a favourite place for encampment, and droves of Bringarries, or other public carriers, halted there in fair weather. Now, however, it was quite vacant, and the natural gloom of the place was deepened by the darkness of the night, while the glare to which their eyes had been exposed, caused it to seem more gloomy still.

"An evil-looking place, friend, at this hour," said Fazil.

"Ay, Meah, dark enough; yet better than the light we have left yonder," he replied, pausing and looking back to where the glare of the kullal's quarter rose into the dark night air above the houses:—"better than that. Yet it is a strange place to come to at night, unless there be any one here. Be cautious, Meah, I will look in."

The temple was a small one, upon a low basement; the high conical roof or steeple could hardly be traced among the heavy foliage that enveloped it. There was a court around it, the wall of which was not so high on one side but that a man standing on tip-toe might look over it; and as Fazil was about to do so, Bulwunt Rao pulled him back.

"For your life, no," he whispered, "some one is there. I saw the flicker of a fire yonder; come round to the back of the verandah. I know of a hole in the wall which is not filled up."

Fazil followed. His companion was right. A hole had been left in the wall for light or air, and some loose stones and bricks stuffed into it. Just enough aperture remained for both to see plainly what was therein. On two sides of the small court, opposite to the temple, was a terraced building roughly built, the pillars supporting the clay roof being of rudely hewn timber. The basement was level with that of the temple, and ascended by three low steps in the centre. Three persons were sitting on the floor near the embers of a fire; two enveloped in white sheets, which were drawn over their heads, and partly over their faces; they might be Bramhuns, who had been worshipping at the temple. The other was a "Jogi," or ascetic, who, in all his majesty of dirt and ashes —his hair matted and twisted about his head like a turban, the ends of a long grizzly beard tucked over his ears, and naked to the waist—sat cross-legged upon a deer's skin before the embers, which cast a dull and flickering light upon his naked body.

Occasionally, with his right hand, he took ashes from the fire and rubbed them over his broad hairy chest and sinewy arms, and occasionally over his face, telling his beads the while with his left. None of the men spoke. Could they be the persons of whom they were in search?

"I fear we are wrong, Bulwunt," whispered Fazil, "these must be Bramhuns with that Jogi."

"I know of no other temple, Meah," returned Bulwunt; "but wait here, I will go round to the door and question them."

"Be careful, friend; I like not the look of the old Jogi; be careful," interrupted Fazil.

"Nay, I am not going to quarrel with him," continued Bulwunt Rao; "but watch what they do. You will see all their faces if they turn to me." And with cautious steps he moved in.

The door of the temple was in front. Bulwunt had seen it was partially open when they arrived. Fazil heard it creak on its hinges as Bulwunt opened it, and saw him emerge from behind the basement of the temple; and amidst a rough cry of "who comes?" "who art thou?" from the three persons, walk slowly and firmly up to the basement of the verandah, and make the customary reverential salutation.

"Thou art a bold fellow," exclaimed one of the men covered with a sheet, who stood up, looking at Bulwunt from head to foot, "to intrude upon respectable people unbidden. A Gosai, too, whence art thou?"

"I am a poor disciple of Amrut Geas, of Kullianee, if ye know the town," answered Bulwunt, deferentially; "and they call me Poorungeer. I have come to the city on business, and have travelled far to-day. I often put up here, and, as I saw lights, I entered, in the hope of shelter for the night. It will rain pre-

sently, and, with your permission, I will take a drink of water and rest here."

"There is plenty of water in the well without," returned the man sulkily; "and there is the iron bucket and cord—take them and begone. There are a thousand Gosain's mutts in Beejapoor, why shouldst thou stay here?—begone!"

"Nay, be not inhospitable, O Bawa!" returned Bulwunt. "I am weary and footsore; it is a long way to the only mutt, I know, and it is not safe for a man alone to pass the plain at night."

"I tell thee begone," said the Jogi; "there is no room for thee here; begone, else we will turn thee out."

"Direct me, then, to a resting-place, good sirs," replied Bulwunt. "I would give no offence; I pray ye be not angry. "Nay," he continued, observing a gesture of impatience; "behold, I am gone. I would not be unwelcome. Only say, O Jogi, what this temple is called?"

"This is the temple of Toolja Dévi, and dedicated to the Holy Mother at Tooljapoor," replied the man. "If thou hast need to visit it, come to-morrow, and thou wilt see the image. Depart now, or these worthy men may be angry. Thou hast interrupted already a discourse on the mysteries——"

"Which would have benefited me, Bawa, also. I shall not forget their inhospitality. Now I depart." And saluting the Jogi, who lifted his hand to his head, and staring fixedly at the others, whose faces

were plainly visible by the light of the fire, which had blazed up, Bulwunt Rao left them.

"Listen, Meah," whispered Bulwunt to Fazil, as he rejoined him. "These are the people, no doubt; there are some holes in the wall behind them, which I saw when within; come round to them, we shall see and hear better, and can listen to the old Jogi's discourse on the mysteries; no doubt it will be edifying. The old Jogi is some one, I think, in disguise, but it is well done. Come, and tread softly."

The light tread of their naked feet was not heard amidst the rustling of the trees above; and, as Bulwunt had said, there were several holes in the wall which enabled them to see and hear perfectly, except when the conversation was carried on in the lowest whispers. They were, however, on the highest side of the court wall.

"We are right now," whispered Fazil; "but have the weapons ready in case of need. I like not the Jogi nor his friends."

The inmates of the little building were silent for some time, and one of them, who had kept his face concealed, at length lay down, and drew his sheet over him. The other two smoked at intervals. Now, one, now the other, lighting the rude cocoanut hooka with embers from the fire before them.

"Didst thou know that lad, Pahar Singh—that Gosai?" asked his companion. "Methinks he was more than he seemed. I know most of that old

robber Amrut Geer's Cheylas,* too, but not him; he may be a new one perhaps. Only I wish I had not seen him; there was an evil eye in his head;" and the speaker's shoulders twitched as though a slight shudder had passed through him.

"What dost thou care about evil eyes, Maun Singh?" replied the Jogi, laughing. "I know not the man, and why should he trouble thee, brother? Depend upon it he was no more than he seemed, else why should he have named Amrut Geer of Tooljapoor? Why art thou thus suspicious?" And he again applied himself to the hooka, whose bubbling rattle rang through the building.

"Nay, it does not signify, only one does not like to be intruded upon, that's all. I had as well shut the door of the temple, brother."

"Do not bolt it," cried the Jogi; "they will be here soon," as the man went and closed it; then returned, and with another shrug or shiver, lay down, when both relapsed into silence.

"Pahar Singh!" whispered Bulwunt to the young Khan; "the robber, murderer, rebel, what you please. The man after whom we wandered so long last year. Ah, 'tis a rare plot, Meah, if such be the instruments."

"Hush!" said Fazil; "they are speaking again. Listen!"

"Where did you get those papers, O, Toolsee Das?" asked Pahar Singh of the man who had been

* Disciples.

lying down. "What, hast thou been asleep? Tell me again, lest I make a mistake."

"Not I, please your Highness," replied the person addressed, raising himself upon his arm; "but if you talk in that gibberish language of your country, what am I to do? It is dull work waiting when one's eyes are heavy with sleep, and I am not rested from that fearful ride."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Pahar Singh; "that ride, Lalla! O man! it was but a child's ride after all, only forty coss.* You will be lively enough by-and-by. Now, if you can speak without lying, tell me truly, are those papers genuine or not?"

"My lord," replied the Lalla, sitting up; "they who come will best know that. If they had not been genuine they would not have been worth the stealing, nor these long journeys, to which your servant is not accustomed, nor the risk of being compared with original documents. I told my lord this before, and——"

"True, Lalla," said Pahar Singh, interrupting him; "but one likes to hear a thing over again when it is pleasant. Ha, ha! when it is pleasant, you know——"

"When the honour of great houses is at stake we Mutsuddees have to be proportionably careful," returned the Lalla pompously; "and when your poor servant saw what these were, you see—my consideration for the king—— for this state—may it flourish

* Eighty miles.

a thousand years — was great, and I — I, ahem — brought them away——"

"You mean you stole them, Lalla? Out with the truth, good fellow."

"Well, sir, if you don't like my words. Yes, I stole them, and it was a blessed chance which has enabled me to turn them to such good account," said the Lalla, smiling blandly. "Excellent indeed, my lord; and I," continued the Lalla, rubbing his hands, "ha! ha! my lord, and I——"

"Ha! ha! ha!" responded Pahar Singh, interrupting him with a coarse laugh. "We shall see. No blood in that robbery, Maun Singh. Ours are seldom so neatly done, I think; but the Lalla is a master of his craft. Well, and if they are genuine, you will have a rich reward. O, much money; gold perhaps, who knows? and half is mine for not cutting that lying coward throat of yours, or hanging you like a dog, Lallajee."

"Noble prince, I have not forgotten the agreement, nor my lord's hospitality," returned the Lalla, joining his hands.

"Ah, that is well," returned Pahar Singh grimly. "One should not forget obligations, and they are only five days old. By your child's head, Maun Singh, he had a narrow escape, only for the boy and thee. Ah, it was rare fun. A coward—a peculiar coward! He did not think he should live, and he told us of the papers, only for that, they would have gone into the river with his carcass. Ah, yes; it was well

done. What if they are false, O Lalla, and we have been brought so far in vain! O man, think of that."

"Yes, think of that, Lallagee," returned Maun Singh, turning himself lazily round to speak. "There are few like thee who are made guests of, and fed instead of becoming food. Ha, ha, ha! art thou not afraid?"

"My lords, I can say no more. I have told you all I can, and the rest is in their hands who come," said the Lalla, humbly putting up his hands to his nose. In his heart, however, the man was chuckling secretly. He thought those who were to come would be attended by a retinue, and he purposed to watch his opportunity and denounce the robber, who would be seized on the bare mention of his name; and when he, Toolsee Das, should not only get the price of the papers, but, he felt sure, be rewarded for having enticed so wary a robber into a trap. The Lalla, therefore, endured the raillery and coarse abuse expended upon him with a peculiarly grim satisfaction.

"Yes, a cowardly knave, by your eyes, Maun Singh," continued Pahar Singh, while both were laughing heartily. "Ah, how he begged for life! And we have fed him well since too, though I am not sure that I did right in bringing him here after all. I think I ought to have sent thee after thine ancestors, Lalla!"

"I doubt not, valiant sir, that your worship hath slain many of the King's enemies," said the Lalla, trembling in spite of himself, but inwardly determin-

ing to show no mercy, "and you are pleased to be merry."

"Dog, if thou hast deceived me, and brought me fifty coss for nothing, to save thy miserable life," said Pahar Singh, fiercely, "thou shalt not escape me twice. Hark! what is that at the door?" for it was now shaken violently; "they are come, Maun Singh. Remember, Lalla, I am no Pahar Singh now, or thou diest on the spot. See what I have for thee here," and he showed the shining naked blade of a sword concealed under the ashes. "Enough, don't be frightened, only be discreet. Go, Maun Singh brother, open the wicket quickly," for those without again shook it impatiently. "Two are to come, only the two; there might be treachery with more. But ho, ho, ho! Pahar Sing is a match for ten, is he not? Now, see thou speakest the truth, O Lalla," he continued; "and my vows for the temple, and the well, they are not to be forgotten—nor—the feeding—five thousand Bramhuns. Forget not this on thy life. I am thy Gooroo,* teaching thee 'the mysteries.'"

These words came from him, jerked out, as it were, by morsels, during the brief interval that elapsed before those he expected arrived; and which he employed in rubbing additional handfuls of ashes from the edges of the fire upon his face, body, and limbs, so as to render his disguise more complete, and in heaping up ashes on his sword, the hilt of which lay towards him, ready for action. As he finished, he

* Spiritual teacher.

took a string of wooden beads from his hair, and settled himself on his heels, in an attitude of austere devotion; for, after a brief parley at the gate, steps were heard advancing, and the Lalla, though his heart sank within him at seeing only two persons accompanying Maun Singh, rose as they ascended the steps of the basement, and were clearly visible by the light of the fire, which Pahar Singh had caused to burn brightly.

Fazil Khan's heart beat fast as he saw that one of the persons who ascended first was the King's secretary, his most trustworthy and confidential servant. His handsome, grave, Persian face, and long grey beard, with the lameness he was known by, which resulted from a wound, were unmistakable. The other, who had his face partly concealed, and who might be taken for an ordinary attendant to the Secretary, seemed nowise remarkable; but, as the pair sat down before him, and this person removed one fold of the scarf about his face—though he kept his mouth and nose still covered, as if to exclude the night air—the large sad eyes of the young King were plainly visible.

Fazil beheld him with an intensity of wondering interest, which it is impossible to describe, and fairly panted with excitement. "If he had known whom he was to meet here," he thought, "he would not have exposed himself to this risk: Alla and the Prophet have sent us." And as this escaped him, partly interjectionally and partly in devout prayer, the young

Khan seemed to swell with the consciousness that his King might owe his safety, nay, even life, to them. The Secretary was a veteran soldier, but he was unarmed, except a small knife-dagger in his girdle. Fazil, therefore, loosened his sword in its sheath. "Be ready," he whispered to his companion, who pressed his hand silently, in acknowledgment of the caution. Bulwunt had evidently not recognised the King; indeed, it was well perhaps that he could not see the face, or have his suspicions awakened: he might not have preserved the same composure as his young master.

CHAPTER XXI.

The silence was becoming oppressive, though only of a few moments' duration, when Fazil observed the Jogi twitch the sleeve of the Lalla's garment as a sign to begin. Though it had cost him a pang to think he had no present hope of securing the robber, Toolsee Das, in truth, was pretty much at his ease. The position and rank of the King's secretary were unequivocal; who the other person might be, he could not conjecture—perhaps an assistant, perhaps a son—he might be either. There was something, certainly, in the look of those great black eyes, which was uncommon; but they gave no response to the Lalla's rapid but curious investigation of them: they could not be fathomed at a glance.

There was nothing in the demeanour of either of the persons before him to excite personal apprehension; and the Lalla was quite sure that Pahar Singh would not give him up, or the papers either, without an equivalent in money; and as he could not have Pahar Singh taken, it was assuring to think that he need not be apprehended himself, for it was

quite certain that the robber would get more for the secret here than if he and the papers had been conveyed to the Imperial camp. There, a short questioning, and the executioner would be sure; and the Lalla shuddered for an instant at the thought of what would have followed. Here, as one who could give information of the enemy, and who could disclose state counsels, to what might he not aspire? If the people and their language were barbarous in northern estimation, yet he had seen enough of the city to be satisfied of its beauty; and were not many of the northern people already settling among the Dekhanies?

Such thoughts were flashing rapidly through the Lalla's mind—far more rapidly than we can write them—when he felt the sudden twitch we have already mentioned: he joined his hands together, and began, in a mincing accent, some of those courtly Persian phrases of complimentary welcome, common to the Mahomedans of the north, and which we need not repeat. The Secretary, however, was not in a mood to endure them.

"Peace, Lallajee!" he said; "we are rougher people here than those from whom you have brought these idle compliments, and you can keep them till you get back. Now to business—do not detain us."

"Ah, yes. My lord desired to see some letters of which I spoke to him," he replied; "some that I mentioned yesterday."

"It is therefore that I have come, and it will be well

if they can be produced. You have higgled for them overmuch, good fellow," replied the Secretary, curtly.

"Nay, if my lord regrets," said the Lalla, "there is no need to press the matter further. Baba!" he continued to the pretended Jogi, "thou canst burn them in the fire there, only perhaps the King——"

"Not so fast, good sir," said the Meerza, speaking more blandly. "I remember all that has passed between us and that valiant gentleman yonder," and he pointed to Maun Singh, "and I am willing to perform my part of the bargain. And is this the Gooroo of whom ye spoke?"

"Sir, it is," replied the Lalla. "A holy man—one unused to the ways of the world, and who travels from shrine to shrine in the performance of sacred vows. Such were the Rishis; such are those from whom holy actions emanate; and such are the virtuous Jogies of the present day, of whom my Gooroo is a noble example. He, desiring the welfare of the Shah —may his splendour increase, and live for ever!— sent me to inform you, O fountain of eloquence and discretion! that they were in existence——" Here the Jogi gave another twitch of interruption, and a look, with a low growl, which the Lalla well understood, and continued—

"You see, noble sirs, he hath already suffered the interruption of his devotional abstraction, and is uneasy; for he never speaks unless to bless his disciples, or removes his eyes from the end of his nose: in continuing which, and repeating to himself holy

texts and spells of wonderful power, he is pre-eminent in absorption of his faculties. So my lord will excuse him, and will remember the condition attached to the perusal of the papers."

"The gold, the gold—the money first!" growled the Jogi. "My son, my vow, my vow!"

"Noble sirs," continued the Lalla in a deprecatory whine to both, which appeared perfectly natural, as he looked from one to the other, with his hands joined, "you must pardon him; he is not a man of courts or of the world, but of temples, and holy shrines, and ascetic exercises; and some time ago he made a vow to build a temple on a spot where he had an ecstatic vision of heaven, and to dig a well, and feed five thousand Bramhuns, and to pass the remainder of his days in assisting poor travellers and in holy contemplation. A holy man, therefore, noble gentlemen, and he is anxious about the gold, not as filthy lucre, but for the sake of the temple and the well."

"Peace!" interrupted the Meerza. "What, in the name of the Shytan,* are the well and the temple to us? Let us get up and depart, Sahib," he said to his companion; "they have no papers; this is but a scheme to raise money. I like them not, my lord," he added in a whisper, "and bitterly do I regret having brought you here unarmed and unattended. May God and the Prophet take us safe hence!"

The Lalla was not watching their faces in vain; he

* *Shytan*—The devil.

felt that he had gone far enough; and a fresh scowl from Pahar Singh, which was not to be mistaken: and his action, as he turned up a corner of the deerskin on which he sat, exhibiting a small red satin bag which might contain papers, assured the Lalla that he need not delay longer.

"Nay, my lords, be not impatient," he said blandly. "When was—he, he!—business of importance ever well done in a hurry? Behold!" added the Lalla, taking up the bag, "here are the papers which the holy father has kept safely for me beneath his deer's-hide. Have I your permission to open them, Baba?"

"Open, and be quick," was the short answer of the Jogi.

"Simply then, noble sirs," continued the obsequious Lalla, taking some Persian letters out of the bag, here they are; and if either of ye know the handwriting, the signature, or the seals of Khan Mahomed, Wuzeer of Beejapoor, he will, Inshalla! be able to recognise them. I do not know them myself, but that makes no difference; they are no forgeries. If you, my lord," he added to the Meerza, "know them, you will find that your poor servant has spoken the truth. Look at them carefully."

The Meerza received the packet with trembling hands, but he said firmly, "Thou knowest the penalty thou hast incurred if these be forged; and if a slave like thee shouldst have dared to question falsely the honour of one so exalted as the Wuzeer, beware!"

"I know—I know, O most exalted and worthy sir!" replied the Lalla, humbly but confidently shutting his eyes, folding his hands upon his breast, and bowing his head over them; "your worship told me before it would be death. But it will not be so. O no! In your poor slave's destiny is written favour and advancement at your hands, and his planets are in a fortunate conjunction."

"I would hang him to the highest tree in Beejapoor, to the topmost branch of the Goruk Imlee,* to feed the crows and kites for a week. What a rascal he is, Meah!" whispered Bulwunt.

"Hush, and be ready! there is a life on every word," returned Fazil, hearing the King speak in Persian in an under-tone to the Meerza.

"There is no escape from death," he said in a sad tone, "if these papers be not false."

"True!" exclaimed the Jogi, abruptly, but whether it had reference to the Lalla's speech or the King's, could not be certain. The King looked at him suspiciously, but the man appeared once more to have relapsed into abstraction.

"Oh, that I know, worthy sir," returned the Lalla carelessly, "we must all die in the end: we are all mortal: what saith Sadi?" and he quoted a verse from the Bôstan. "I have no fear of them, noble gentlemen! May it please you to look at them first, and

* *Goruk Imlee*—Adansonia Gigantea. Underneath these fine trees, which are of great age, and to their branches, the executions in Beejapoor used to be done.

then determine about killing me afterwards. He, he, he!"

"He does not tremble under those eyes," whispered Fazil to his companion. "This must be true. God help them all!"

"If there be faith in handwriting and seals," resumed the Lalla after a pause, "I fear not. If these documents had not been so precious, why should the asylum of the world, my master, have kept them so carefully in his own writing-case? The time is not come, O Meerza! but you will yet hear of a reward having been set upon your poor slave's head. Be it so; I claim the protection of Ali Adil Shah for the service I now do him, Bismilla! Open the packet there, and say whether I have death and infamy before me, or life and honour in the King's service, for there is more at stake in this matter than my lord knows of. Bismilla! open it."

The Meerza held the packet irresolutely, as one who almost feared a knowledge of its contents, and looked for a moment to his companion——

"Bismilla!" said the King, eagerly speaking in Persian, "open it; this suspense is intolerable. Dost thou fear for Khan Mahomed? art thou his friend?"

"By your head and eyes, by the King's salt, no," answered the other. "For good or for evil, Bismilla! I open it,"—and he tore the cover hastily.

The heart of Fazil Khan beat so hard in his bosom that its throbbings seemed painfully audible to himself, and he almost fancied they must be heard by

all inside; but he was still, as was also his companion.

As the wax-cloth covers were withdrawn, there appeared several letters in the bundle,—large, and the paper covered with gilding, such as are sent to persons of the most exalted rank only. Eagerly, most eagerly, did the practised eye of the Secretary run over each superscription, and each was narrowly scrutinised. One by one he passed them to the King, and Fazil could see that, whatever they were, they caused the deepest expression of interest in both their countenances. Suddenly the Meerza came to one which, having examined even more narrowly than the others, he passed on, with a deep sigh, to the King.

It was taken eagerly, and at once opened and read, while the Lalla turned from one to the other with an intense expression of curiosity, fear, and hope blended together, marked on his features.

"Does that Jogi understand Persian, thinkest thou?" asked the King of the Lalla.

"Not a word, I will answer for it with my head," returned the man confidently. "How should he?"

"And thyself?"

"Surely, excellent sir; I have long served in the royal Dufter, else how should I have known what to take and what to leave?" He spoke now in Persian, and the conversation continued in that language.

"If there were more, why didst thou not take all, Lalla?" asked the Meerza.

"All? Meerza Sahib? that the theft might be discovered before I had time to get away? Ah, no, good sir! A Mutsuddee may be a rogue, but he should have discretion," and he quoted the Persian proverb to that effect; "and to all appearance the royal desk still holds the same packet which I made up with other papers, and sealed with the private signet as it was before. No; the theft is not suspected yet, unless that packet have been opened by the Emperor when I was missed——"

"And thou knowest the contents of this letter, Lalla?" inquired the King.

"I could say them to you, for I have them by heart, noble sir; perhaps they are somewhat remarkable, for when I read them, I thought Ali Adil Shah would like to hear them, so I committed them to memory. I will even repeat the letter to you if this worthy Meerza have no objection. I presume," he continued to the Secretary, "that your friend is in the King's confidence as much as yourself."

"Surely," was the reply. "I may say that he is more in it than I am myself, else I had not brought him."

"Enough," said the Lalla; "I am satisfied. Now, open the letter and compare it with what I repeat. There is no Alkab."*

"True," said the King, "he has drawn a Mudd† at the top."

* *Alkab*—Titles and complimentary sentences prefixed to Persian letters according to rank of party addressed.

† *Mudd.*—When the party addressed is of very exalted rank no Alkab is used. A line is drawn across, which is called Mudd.

"Proceed after the Mudd, then," continued the Lalla, "the letter runs thus :—

"It has been the will of the all-powerful that the forces of my lord, the ruler of both worlds, should retire. Let not that trouble his heart. By the favour of the most merciful, matters will yet take a prosperous course for my lord's true interests. All here, with this poor suppliant for his bounty, are day and night labouring in his behalf: and already many, as by the endorsed list, with their adherents, have been gained to the true cause. Others demur, but will repent; again, others are obstinate, and cannot be moved, but they are not many. A few months more, and when the season opens, the harvest will be ripe for the gathering. Then, there will be no turning back for my lord from this city; for its people, with this poor servant, rejoicing to escape tyranny, will at once turn to the asylum of the two worlds, and give my lord's fortunate footsteps a happy welcome. We are tired of the false religion; and as to the King, he is but yet a boy, and has neither power, knowledge, nor any friends: and are men of venerable age to submit tamely to his idle fancies? Surely not. He can be ultimately provided for. For the rest, my lord's promises are undeserved by the least of his servants, who is not fit to kiss his feet; but my lord can at least rely that his administration will be carried on entirely in his interest, and to his honour and glory. What need to write more? it would be beyond the bounds of respect. May the splendour

of dominion and honour increase! The signature of Khan Mahomed, Wuzeer of Beejapoor."

"Ay, what need of more?" sighed the young King. "Enough here—enough to prove the man's treachery, the least deserved that ever the false world saw. Yet, Meerza, there are still many true to the King: there are some suspected ones in the list that we know of," he continued, his eye running rapidly over it, "but Afzool Khan, and many of note, are not here, and yet rumour has assailed them also."

"Yes, they are intimates," said the Secretary, "but no more, I think."

"Then I have won my reward and my life!" exclaimed the Lalla anxiously, in his own tongue.

"Your life, surely," replied the Meerza; "but for the reward, we need to make some further scrutiny into those papers ere that can be disbursed: they must be compared with others in the King's possession. Therefore I will take them with me to-night, and if you will come to me—you know my house—early to-morrow, all will be arranged to your satisfaction."

"But, my lord—noble sirs," cried the Lalla, in evident dread, "that was no part of the bargain. Did we not settle——" He could not, however, finish the sentence on account of a rude and decisive interruption.

"I forbid it. I forbid one paper or one of you passing hence this night till the money is paid," said the Jogi, severely.

"And who art thou?" demanded the Meerza, haughtily. "Peace! withdraw; this is no place for thee, or the like of thee."

"Who am I?" retorted the ruffian. "Who am I? One who has the right, as he has the power, to demand what he seeks." And as he spoke he snatched from beneath the heap of ashes before him the heavy sword he had kept concealed there, which flashed brightly in the firelight, and started to his feet, as did also his follower. "Stir not!" he exclaimed to the King and Secretary, who had been too much startled by the sudden action to rise with the Jogi; "Stir not, or ye die on the spot!" Drawing himself up to his majestic height, Pahar Singh laughed scornfully. "Ha, ha, ha! a boy and a penman against me! Ha, ha, ha! put up thy weapon, Maun Singh, there is no need of it."

"Who art thou?" demanded the King, rising notwithstanding the threat, and returning the glance as steadily as it was given.

"It concerns thee not," answered Pahar Singh. "Pay me the money promised on those papers—ten thousand good rupees—on this spot, or you pass not hence alive. Brother," he added to Maun Singh, "be ready. They have brought the money, and we must get it."

It was a moment of intense anxiety to Fazil Khan and his companion. A word—a sound from them, and the life of the young King was gone. Fazil could see that, except a small dagger in each of their girdles,

the King and his Secretary were unarmed. To rush to them soon enough to be of use, was a thing impossible; they would be dead ere he could strike a blow. There was no absolute peril, however, as yet, and too much at stake to risk anything. Pahar Singh appeared to have no evil intention; but, if provoked, it was plain he might do violence, and would not hesitate to use his weapon if rescue were attempted.

The King saw his danger. There was little avail in temporising, and his thought and action were alike prompt. His own life and his friend's were both at stake; and what did the money signify? Not a feather in the balance. Could his attendants, whom he had left at a distance, even hear of his danger, he must perish ere they could approach him.

"Hold!" he cried, "whoever thou art, Jogi. If the Lalla says thou art to have the money, it will be given. Our bargain was with him."

"And his with me," returned the man. "Give it me;" and as he spoke he advanced close to the King.

"Pay it to him—let him have it," cried the Lalla to the King, "and keep back your men if you have any with you, else there will be bloodshed. He is desperate, noble sirs; do not provoke him."

"I would do him no harm," said Pahar Singh to the Secretary, "but it is as well to be certain in case of treachery;" and he drew a small dagger from his girdle with his left hand, and held it in an attitude to strike into the King. "Go, if the money is here;

bring it quickly; but beware of any attempt to rescue him, or you will cause his death. You could not reach me ere I had struck him down. Go then, Meerza Sahib, my friend Maun Singh will bring the bags: he is strong enough."

"Go, friend," said the King, "do as he says. If the people ask questions, say I am safe, and will be with them presently."

"And leave thee with him!" said the Meerza, anxiously. "I will not stir; there is peril, and my place is beside thee."

"There is no peril if ye are true," said Pahar Singh; "much, if ye are false. Go!"

"Go, friend, I will trust him; his object is money, not my poor life. Go! I am not afraid of him, nor he of me," said the King.

"How noble he is!" whispered Fazil to his companion.

Both would have given all they possessed to have been by the King's side to have struck down the ruffian.

"Ay, Meah, I would we were by his side," returned Bulwunt. "Who can he be? Whoever he may be, he is indeed fearless; but he will not be harmed if they bring the money. Hush! they may speak again."

The Meerza turned silently to go, and descended the step, accompanied by Maun Singh.

"Come," said the latter to the Lalla; "help to carry the bags, good man; it will save me another journey. Come!"

The Lalla followed, and the two remained standing

face to face, the young King and the outlaw looking steadily at each other.

"Afraid of thee?" said Pahar Singh in a low voice, and dropping the arm which had held the dagger uplifted. "Afraid of thee? No, proud boy: he who defied thy father's power at its greatest, hath little to fear from thine. Ali Adil Shah, thinkest thou that this poor disguise could conceal thee? Yet thou art bold and true, and I rejoice that I have had proof of it, for men told me thou wert a coward—a boy of the zenana—only fit to herd with women. Now thou hast met the Lion of the Hill* bravely," he continued, using the play on his own name, "and he will turn from thee peacefully. Thy life hath been in my hand —nay, is now in it were I to strike—but I give it to thee freely; promise me mine in return, and swear by thy father's spirit that, once gone from this, thou wilt not turn back, nor suffer any one of thy retinue to do so."

The King started as the man covertly declared his name, and the covering fell from his face.

"Thou Pahar Singh, the Lion of Allund?" he said.

"Even so, monarch," returned the chief. "Ha! ha! The man whom thy slaves—cowards—tell thee they pursue. Aha! they dare not. Pahar Singh is monarch of his own wilds; no royal troops dare to come near them. But keep thine own counsel, and now listen. Thou mayst need me yet, and I may do thee good service. Two thousand good hearts and

* Pahar Singh.

stout arms, such as thy money cannot hire, serve Pahar Singh. Swear to keep faith with me, and I will be true. Hadst thou been a coward, and quailed at the sight of this weapon, I should have been tempted to slay thee, Adil Khan, like a dog, for never yet did coward sit on the throne of Beejapoor. For what has happened, thou hast my respect. Enough! remember Pahar Singh, and in two days or less I will send thee more tidings, or come myself. Thou mayst kill the messenger, but he will not tell of my hiding-place; and if harm come to him, I swear to thee, by the Lady of Tooljapoor,* my holy Mother, that I will take a life for every hair of his head, and burn a hundred villages. Now, silence! I have spoken. Am I free to go, scathless as thou art? Thy hand upon it, monarch!"

It was frankly given, and the rebel and outlaw, instead of taking it rudely, and as if prompted suddenly by a kindly feeling of reverence for his King, bent his head gently, touched it with his forehead, and kissed it.

"Thy hand has touched my lips—put it upon my head, and swear by thy father not to harm me," he said, quickly.

"I swear by my father not to harm thee, Pahar Singh: only be thou henceforth faithful to thy King's salt," he replied, as he placed both his hands upon the outlaw's head.

* The goddess Bhowani, whose temple at Tooljapoor has already been described.

"Enough," returned Pahar Singh, removing them, pressing them again to his forehead, and kissing them reverently; "I will be true to thy salt, O King; but speak to no one of me, and wait patiently till I come—I may have news for thee. A fakeer's rags and a beggar's cry admit me everywhere—"Ulla dilâyâ to léonga"*—by night or by day, wherever thou art, in durbar or zenana, whenever you hear it—admit me, or order me to be confined, and send for me—I shall bawl loudly enough. If I come not in two days, do not doubt me; but stir not in this matter till I arrive—it may be very soon, I cannot say. Now cover thy face; they come," and he resumed his former threatening attitude.

The Meerza, with the two others, emerged from behind the temple almost as he spoke, and in a few moments had ascended the steps of the apartment. Maun Singh drew a heavy bag from beneath the scarf which was round his shoulders; but the eye of the robber at once detected its small size.

"Those are not rupees, Meerza; beware of treachery with me. I have not harmed him," he exclaimed.

"No, it is gold, holy Baba. Behold!" and he opened the bag, and poured the contents carefully into a little heap on the floor near the fire. "There is more than *he* bargained for," he continued, pointing to the Lalla, "but it does not matter; you are welcome to it, for the temple and the well."

"Enough," returned Pahar Singh; "I am satisfied.

* "If God give I will take."

Go, take your papers, and begone; molest me no more." And, sitting down on his deer's hide, he heaped up the gold coins carefully with his left hand, while his right still held the sword.

"And my reward, O Meerza Sahib!" cried the Lalla eagerly, as he and the King turned to depart; "thou wilt not abandon me to him."

"It is there with the rest," answered the Secretary; "Lallajee, help yourself, we must begone."

"Nay, but I want it not; only take me away—take me away. I fear him," cried the man, in a piteous voice, and trembling violently.

"Peace, fool," exclaimed Pahar Singh, rising and holding him back powerfully. "Peace, I will settle with thee!"

CHAPTER XXII.

For a moment the natural presence of mind which Fazil possessed deserted him, and his brain seemed to reel under conflicting thoughts, and the weight and importance of the secret of which he had become possessed. Should he disclose himself to the King as he passed out, and urge him to allow Pahar Singh to be taken? The retinue which awaited the monarch would be enough to surround the temple, and the robber's capture or death was certain. It was a deed to do to prove his devotion, and the country would be free of a bold and mischievous marauder, who plundered it up to the gates of the city. But the King's promise to the outlaw was for the time sacred, and there was, perhaps, further service to be done by the man, which could not be delayed. As regards the Wuzeer and his family, also, he must avow his knowledge of the secret to the King, when he might be charged as his spy, and so share the Wuzeer's fate. These thoughts checked the impulse which had so nearly carried him on,—it might have been to destruction.

"Shall we follow him? shall we speak to the king?" asked Bulwunt hurriedly, observing Fazil's irresolution. "Say quickly, Meah,—we have not a moment to lose."

"No, no! we are better here," replied Fazil. "The avowed knowledge of that secret might chance to be our death-warrant; and has not the King given him kowl?* Let us watch still — we may gather further particulars; but to follow the King is madness. Listen! they are speaking." Again, therefore, they resumed their respective positions.

A few sticks had been thrown on the embers, and Maun Singh was kneeling down and blowing them into a flame, which, bursting through them in small flashes with every breath, partially illumined the figures around it and the blackened walls of the apartment. Pahar Singh sat with the gold coins before him, counting them one by one. A large portion were already laid on one side, which he proceeded to drop into the bag. The expression of his coarse and savage features could now be distinctly seen; for not only was the light from the fire becoming steady, but he had moved from his original position, so that he sat with his face nearly full towards Fazil, though from Bulwunt Rao he was more concealed than before. It was a face which, once seen, could never be forgotten. Men saw it and quailed before it: women saw it and shuddered: and Fazil remembered how often old Goolab, when he was yet a child,

* *Kowl*—protection and assurance.

had frightened him by the mention of Pahar Singh: while tales of his occasional frays and bloody deeds were of every-day report in the bazar.

There, then, he sat. Turban he had none: his matted hair, twisted into a rough rope, was tied in a knot on the crown of his head, and covered with ashes, showing the high narrow forehead—on which, though crossed by deep wrinkles, the forked veins, swelled by his excitement, stood out like ridges, betokening passions wild, fierce, and uncontrollable. The eyes, always bright, glittered restlessly and suspiciously from beneath the heavy brows, to which, and to the lids, the white ashes, smeared on his face from time to time as he sat, had adhered; and his hard grin disclosed the prominent eye-teeth, which he chose to call tusks, in allusion to his name.

When we last saw this face at Itga, it was excited, but there was a softening influence exercised by the presence of his adopted son, and Pahar Singh was under some restraint. Now there was none, and it was difficult to recognise the features at all under his disguise, which served to increase the natural ferocity of the expression.

His rough mustaches, of a sandy-brown colour at the ends, mingled with a straggling scanty beard, were usually parted in the middle, and turned over his ears; but now, being loosened, they were tied together in a knot under his chin, in the most approved Jogi fashion. His broad chest was covered with grizzled hair of the same peculiar

colour as his beard; and his skin, originally fair, had become of a deep brown, except where it retained some of its original colour. His arms, which had appeared so muscular when he suddenly started up to threaten the king, seemed even longer and more powerful, as he sat stretching out one over the blaze, while the fingers of the other hand played among the gold pieces before him. Pahar Singh's countenance was now very repellant. It seemed to Fazil that mercy could never issue from those pitiless lips which, with the full nostrils distending and contracting rapidly under the action of feelings not yet expressed, produced an effect which fascinated, while it shocked one unused to it.

"Lallajee," he said, every now and then looking up: "O friend, dost thou love gold? See this is red and pure—ah, yes, lovely—and so it need be, coming out of the King's mint direct. More than ten thousand rupees, too, they said. Well, there are just five hundred and fifty ashruffees.* That is—how much, Maun Singh? thou art a better accountant than I am."

"Somewhere about eleven thousand rupees, I believe, Maharaj," said his follower.

"Well, that will do, Lallajee," continued Pahar Singh. "That is my share for taking care of thee, thou knowest, and getting thee a good market for thy papers. The gods be praised! I vow ten of these

* *Ashruffees*, otherwise called *Mohurs*—gold pieces, usually worth twenty rupees each.

to the holy Mother's necklace at Tooljapoor, and he took up ten pieces of the number that remained."

"Nay, valiant sir," interposed the Lalla: "that is your Excellency's share in the bag yonder. These are mine, not half, as we agreed, but enough perhaps for the poor Lalla. It would be no merit for my lord if he were to give to the Goddess——"

He could not finish the sentence, whatever it might have been intended to mean, for the rude interruption—"Ill-begotten!" cried the robber, snatching a brand from the fire and striking the Lalla's hand, which had advanced towards the heap,—"dare to touch the gold, and thou diest! That for the like of thee!"

"I am your slave," whimpered the man, wringing his hand; "but why did my lord strike so hard?"

"Listen to the coward, brother," said Pahar Singh with a sneer; "a woman would not whine like that. Now, thy share, Maun Singh."

"Of course," said that worthy, "after being dallal* in the matter, and putting my head into jeopardy, running after that mad Secretary into the very palace —where, had any one chanced to recognise me, I should have been cut down or speared like a mad dog—truly, considering the risk, and that day and night's ride to boot, mine comes next. Ah! thou art a just man, O Jemadar."†

"Well, then, hold out thine hand, brother," returned

* *Dallal*—broker or agent.

† *Jemadar*—officer, used in reference to rank.

Pahar Singh, taking up a few coins and dropping them into his hand. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. Good gold, good gold, Lallajee!" he said, looking up: "but it is of no use giving it to him: he will only spend it on women and liquor. Better I should have the rest, who can take care of it, Lalla, and give it him as he needs it—dost thou not think so? Yet, stay, I may as well——nine, ten, that's two hundred rupees, brother—enough for thee. Who would have thought of a bundle of old papers bringing so many bright ashruffees. And after all, O Lalla —by your head—were they true or false, O mean thief?"

"True; I swear by your head and eyes, by the holy Krishna and his temple at Muttra. Canst thou doubt, after what has passed, O Jemadar?" cried the Lalla earnestly.

"Nay, how could I understand thy jabbering of Persian. That was no honest talk, Maun Singh; they meant to cheat us by it, and this slave joined in it. Twenty-one, twenty-two,"—he was counting the remainder of the gold, and dropping the coins into his own bag as he spoke, "twenty-three. Dost thou think, O Lalla, that I am a cheating Mutsuddee, like thyself?—twenty-four, twenty-five.—Ill-begotten clerk, say—am I—Pahar Singh—a liar and a thief like thyself?"——

"May I be your sacrifice, Maharaj, no," cried the Lalla, terrified at his manner, and watching, with evident and ill-concealed uneasiness, coin after coin

disappearing into the bag. "Why should my lord be angry if I spoke in Persian?"

"Ho, ho, thou art frightened again—art thou? Well, perhaps thou couldst not help the Persian, as the letter had to be read; but I understood it all the time, O Lalla. Thou couldst not have cheated me—listen!" he continued in that language, speaking it with a broad Mahratta accent; "what part of this sum dost thou expect for thy share—twenty-six, twenty-seven. There is yet much, Lalla. What sayeth the poet Saadi? Expectation—— No matter, I forget the verses we used to learn at school. How much?"

"Nay, Maharaj, I know not," returned the man in a bewildered manner. "My lord said half would be mine, and the Meerza told us there were more than ten thousand rupees."

"Good, O Lalla, thou patron of valiant men like me: but dost thou expect it? Five thousand rupees! dost thou think that such a sum will come to thee?" and his hand passed to the hilt of his sword.

"My lord! noble prince! I—I—I," stammered the now trembling wretch. "I—I—mean the promise to me. Nay, look not so, Maharaj," as he observed the robber's face distorted with suppressed rage, the veins of his forehead swelled, and white foam gathering about the corners of the mouth. "Nay, look not so angry! Behold, I kiss your feet: I am a very poor man, and a stranger;" and he joined his hands in supplication as he rose

from his heels partly to a kneeling posture. "Would my lord ever have known of the value of those papers had I not told it? Would they not have been thrown away, scattered to the winds, if my poor life had been taken at Itga?"

"My promise!—my promise to thee, O son of a base mother! Didst thou not swear to me they would be worth thousands?—lakhs!"* cried the robber, raising his voice and gesticulating violently, as he now took up the gold pieces by handfuls, and thrust them into the bag. "A lakh of rupees! and here are only a few paltry coins, for which thou hast brought me fifty coss! What will Anunt Geer of Kullianee say to this poor instalment on his debt? Thief! get me the rest—the rest of the gold they have put aside for thee. Didst thou not promise a lakh?"

He had now lashed himself into a fury, which had been his object evidently from the first; and he struck the Lalla with his clenched hand violently upon the head, so that he fell backwards, and lay apparently stunned; but it was only fear.

"He will kill him—not that he does not deserve death, the mean hound!" said Fazil Khan, hurriedly to his companion. "When was Pahar Singh ever known to spare a victim? What is to be done, Bulwunt? shall we attack them?"

"Alas, Meah!" returned the other, "what can be done?—a sound, a word, and the man is dead. We cannot reach them; and the door was closed and

* *Lakh*—100,000.

barred when the others went. Ai Bhowanee! ai Khundôba! ai Bhugwan!* save him! Oh that I had brought my gun with me, or even a pistol, Meah; but he dare not kill him; he is only frightening him out of the money. Hush, and listen!"

"Raise him, brother," continued Pahar Singh to his companion, laughing; "we will soon see whether this fear is true or feigned; or is the coward soul really gone out of his body?"

"Nay, Jemadar, but he breathes," said Maun Singh, raising the Lalla. "Speak, O Toolsee Das! art thou alive?"

"My lords! O my lords!" gasped the terrified wretch; "what have I done? what have I done? why am I beaten?"

"My thousands, I tell thee!" cried the robber hoarsely. "Where are the papers that were to bring me thousands? Thou hast concealed them to sell to others. Liar! liar, and base-born coward, as thou art!—— Enough, Maun Singh," he continued, in another language, which was not understood either by Fazil Khan or his companion, and which both often thought of afterwards; "he must die; the Goddess has sent him; he must die for her, lest he lead other men astray."

"Ay, he is good Bunij,† Jemadar," returned the man coolly. "Methinks this would have saved trouble long ago, and your worship's getting into a passion. We ate the goor this morning"——

* Hindu invocations to divinities.

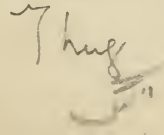
† *Bunij*—Thug slang for a person to be strangled.

"Surely, brother, but no blood. I would not soil my sword with carrion like him; and yours is a certain hand with the handkerchief."

What words can describe the terror of the devoted wretch? He could not speak or cry out. Of what use if he had? He knew the temple was far from men's abodes, and the wind moaned hoarsely in the trees above, as the branches swayed to and fro before a brisk gale now rising with the clouds. He tried to swallow, but in vain. He sat paralysed, as it were, his eyes wandering vacantly from one to the other, while his lips were tightened into a ghastly simper of fear. Neither of the men spoke; but Maun Singh was carelessly twisting a handkerchief into a peculiar form, and tying a knot at the end of it. "Thou wilt not feel it, Lallajee," he said jocularly, but in the strange tongue; "my hand is sure, and I am the best Bhuttote* in Allund."

What the Lalla understood or guessed it was impossible to conceive; but Fazil felt assured that murder was to be done. "By Alla and his Prophet!" he said to Bulwunt, "come what may of it, are we men to stand by tamely and see foul murder committed before our eyes? Were the wretch a hundred times more liar and coward, one good blow should be struck against that ruffian. Ho, Pahar Singh! Maun Singh!" shouted the young Khan before he could be prevented by his companion. "Hold! would ye do murder?"

* Strangler.



"Hur, Hur, Mahadeo!"* cried his companion at the same moment, and both rushed to the place where, on the side they had been standing, the wall seemed the lowest; but it was still too high to be reached without a scramble over rough stones, which delayed them longer than they had thought. The top once gained, they leaped into the enclosure with drawn weapons; but as they did so, Fazil saw one man on the top beyond, another climbing up, aided by his companion. For him and Bulwunt Rao to rush across the court was the act but of an instant; yet they were too late: the Jogi—Pahar Singh—had escaped, and his companion was in the act of dropping down, when, aided by a bound, the well-aimed weapon of the young Khan reached him. Where or how Fazil Khan had wounded the robber he knew not; but when he examined his bright blade, there was a broad stain upon it which could not be mistaken. As he looked, hesitating whether he should leap down and follow, he could just distinguish two figures dimly, running at desperate speed through the trees across the plain, which were quickly lost in the gloom.

Bulwunt Rao was at his side. "Another moment and we should have had both: the gods have protected them; and it is of no use following, Meah," he said.

"No, no, they are gone," returned Fazil;" "it is useless to follow: better for us to see after that poor

* An invocation of Mahadeo or Siva, a Mahratta war-cry.

wretch yonder—the villains may have murdered him, after all;" and they hastened to him.

The flickering blaze was still playing about the little fire, and served them with enough light to distinguish the objects by it, disclosing, too, more of the apartment or verandah than they had yet seen; and as both entered the place at the same moment, a cry of execration burst simultaneously from them.

"The villains have been too sure! While we scrambled among those stones they killed him. See, here is an ugly gash, Meah!" said Bulwunt Rao.

"That would not kill him," said Fazil, stooping to raise up the body—"and he is quite warm. I most fear this cloth about his neck; but look for some water. I would not have him die. So now—dash some in his face—his heart beats, too——he lives, Bulwunt Rao!"

"Praise to Narayen!* there is at least a chance for him," cried Bulwunt. "Awake—arise, O Lalla! and fear not," he continued to the wounded man; "your enemies are gone, and you are with friends who can protect you. Here, drink some water. I am a Hindu who give it; and speak, O man, with a small liver!"

These cheering words, accompanied by a few gentle blows on his back, and a little water forced into his mouth, restored something like consciousness to the wretch. He opened his eyes and stared wildly about, and into the faces of those who stood over him: then he put his hand to his throat as if it hurt him.

* Form of invocation.

"Ay, I daresay," continued Bulwunt—"I daresay they hurt thee badly; but fear not, Sree Swamee* has sent you friends; drink, and it will do you good. Tut man, you need not be particular about caste; here is my junwah,† and there is no need to ask further. That's well—can you speak?"

"Ye are not they," said the Lalla huskily and in a low tone. "Friends how came ye here? Hai, Hai!—alas, where is my gold? and where are the robbers who would have killed me? May their mothers be defiled!"

"Perish the gold, meanhearted," cried Fazil; "with thy soul hovering betwixt life and death, is thy first thought for thy gold?"

"I worship thy feet, brave Gosai," returned the Lalla; "but it was all I had, for which I had risked much. Hai, Hai! it is all gone now, and I am in a strange place without a copper or a friend;" and he turned to the wall and sobbed bitterly.

"It was a round sum to lose, certainly," said Bulwunt; "but thy life is safe, and thou hast only to steal again, Lallajee!"

"Better to have died—better to have died, sirs!" cried the man distractedly. "When shall I see so much gold again? Look, noble sirs, is all gone? has he taken all?"

"It was here they counted it," said Fazil; "look

* *Holy Lord*—An appellation of the deity among Hindus.

† *Junwah*—Bramhinical cord, used also by Rajpoots and some Mahrattas—an emblem of high-caste rank.

about—a piece or two may be found; or they may have dropped some in their flight."

Bulwunt blew a dry stick into a blaze, and looked around. He was fortunate—a few coins had escaped Pahar Singh, which he gave to the Lalla, who tied them up in his waistcloth.

"Look for more—look yonder, kind sir; and the blessings of a poor Khayet be on you both," returned the Lalla. "My eyes are dim: alas!" he exclaimed, as he put his hand to the back of his neck and felt blood,—"I am killed—I am dying!"

"Peace, fool!" cried Fazil impatiently, "a child would have cut deeper: it has been a strange escape. Give me your scarf—I will tie up the wound."

"And here is some more money for you, too, Lallajee," said Bulwunt, who had now returned, having picked up several gold pieces in the line which Pahar Singh had taken across the court. "There may be more, and if you come to-morrow early, you may find them."

"But now we cannot wait, Lalla," added Fazil; "there is no further fear of your life. The clouds are gathering fast, and there will be rain; we will see you safe to a guard-room, and I will have you cared for in the morning; or you can sleep here if you like."

"Ah, leave me not, gentlemen! I am poor and in great pain," replied the man. "My clothes and horse are a long way from hence: how shall I get to them? Take me with you and I shall live, else he will find me out and kill me—that Pahar Singh."

Supporting the wounded man between them, the two friends unfastened the door of the courtyard and passed out. The glare and noise of the bazar seemed only at a short distance, and knowing that a strong guard was placed at night near the end nearest the city, they went to it as directly as they could. A few questions were carelessly asked as to the cause of the wound, and as vaguely answered. A traveller found wounded, who had been robbed, was probably cause enough to acount for his condition.

"We cannot delay, Lalla," said Bulwunt, in answer to his cries that one at least would stay with him. "We have far to go, and the night is passing fast. The clouds, too, are gathering, and the thunder is growling in the distance. Hark! there will be a storm. Come, Meah," he whispered, "we may miss him whom we seek. See that the man's wounds are dressed, Duffadar,"* he continued aloud to the officer of the guard, "and let him sleep here."

* *Duffadar*—A sub-officer; commander of a duffa or subdivision.

CHAPTER XXIII.

As Fazil parted from the wounded man, the scenes of the night, the horrid truth regarding the treachery of his friend's father, the danger which threatened both, and indeed the whole family, caused him many an anxious thought. His worst suspicions had only been too deeply verified, and even now there arose some struggle between duty and allegiance to his King, and affection for the Wuzeer's family, for the sake of his son. Bulwunt had again avoided the principal street, and they were once more in the open ground beyond the houses. Fazil walked on rapidly and silently; but at length the oppression of his thoughts found vent in words. "Let him decide," he said aloud, in allusion to his father; "wisdom abides with him; and in a matter like this his advice is precious."

"And what think you of all this, Meah?" asked his companion, for an instant slackening his pace; "what will the noble Khan Sahib say to it?—not indeed that he and the Wuzeer are very intimate friends

either. I tell thee, were not my heart turning to that devil Tannajee Maloosray, I should be lost in wonder at the Wuzeer's folly."

"Even so," said Fazil, sighing; "a man in whom I would have placed confidence as in my own father—one who ought to be honoured and loved for his faith—is but a poor knave, after all, Bulwunt—not better than that miserable Lalla whom we have just left—a thing for men to spit upon. Alas for the world's honesty, brother! A heap of gold, a few empty titles, the smile of a woman,—and power—which does but make its possessor miserable when he has gained it—turns right to wrong, justice to oppression, virtue to vice, honesty to knavery, faith to treachery. We look for it in the highest, but it flies from us; we seek it in the lowest, and turn from them but too often in despair. Should not one sigh at depravity like this, which finds no echo in one's own heart?"

"True, Meah, and may it long be so with you," returned his companion; "but your experience of life is as yet small, and as it increases I fear you will search in vain for the purity which your own heart now pictures. Perhaps it may exist among women. Sree Swamee knows, and you may find it there. I have not, Meah; but in the world abroad, when you have more to do with it, your sensitive spirit will become blunted by degrees, and, though a serious matter like this will trouble it, you will gradually learn to pass many a broad lie or rogue's trick which now vexes you, without notice beyond a passing curse or a hasty

blow. Patience, Meah Sahib! thou hast much to learn yet; would it were good, and not evil!"

"Ah, would it were, Bulwunt Rao! Your experience is from the crooked ways and thoughts of your own people, of which men make proverbs; but for a noble of the state to betray his salt in this base manner, makes me sick at heart. But this is no time, friend, to think of aught but the work we have to do; and what more has to come of the night we know not. Hark! the thunder growls again, and the storm is coming up fast—we had as well run on to shelter; and what more may follow, Alla knows!"

So saying, they hastened as rapidly as the rough ground and increased darkness would admit, Bulwunt Rao guiding his young master through narrow lanes and over deserted spaces, till they again emerged into the now nearly deserted bazar. It was just past midnight, for the trumpeter at the guard-house, taking up the signal from the fort gate, had blown a flourish, which was understood by the keepers of liquor-shops in the quarter. The booths were still open, as well as those of confectioners and bhung or opium sellers; but the lights were being extinguished, and the groups which had been concealed within turned into the street.

A wild company truly! Some staggering in the last stage of idiotic drunkenness from opium, others tossing their arms wildly in the air, while their obscene and fearful curses and imprecations, mingled with the low muttering of the thunder which hardly

ceased, and seemed to grow nearer every moment. Many forms lay prostrate in the street—some sleeping off the fumes of drink, or groaning in helpless intoxication; and they were often beset by women, whose loosened hair and disordered garments, and the wild leer of their glistening eyes, bespoke their depraved condition. But casting those who were most importunate violently aside, they at length gained the temple, which was close to the drinking-shop we have before mentioned, and paused for a moment near the gate which was now shut, while all was silent within.

"Let me look over thee, Meah," said his companion, "as we have a little light, and are free from those drunken wretches. Dost thou know, Meah, I have been like them sometimes, I fear; but this sight sickens and sobers me."

"God grant it, friend, it is the only thing I have ever feared in you," he replied warmly.

"Yes, it will do," continued Bulwunt; "the disguise is complete. So—the chin scarf a little more over the end of the nose: there—no one would ever suspect you. Now, I have a plan in my head, which thou wilt say could only come of a Mahratta's brain—crooked and wilful. It is this: I think, from bazar gossip, that Tannajee and Pahar Singh are one, and that they have met at Tooljapoor at the temple, or at that old villain Bussunt Geer's, at whose Mutt Tannajee's people put up, or that they have corresponded with each other through him. It is not very long since

I was there—about two months ago, Meah. They were very busy—so much so that the old fox would hardly let me stay; but I was certain there was something going on; and now I have seen Pahar Singh, I am sure he came one day and held counsel with the old Gosai. Now, if Tannajee has not been there—as I will find out, if possible—I can personate Poorun Geer, the disciple of Bussunt Geer, and we may find out more of this plot. But be thou silent—a vow of silence for a year. I dread thy courtly speech breaking out even of our rough Mahratta tongue, or a Mussulmani oath. Trust to me, Meah; I will not fail thee if we meet this fellow!"

"I would we had brought the guard with us, Bulwunt," said Fazil.

"Guard!" said his companion, laughing. "Look, there are his sentinels. That fellow," pointing to a figure seated at a little distance on the ground, muffled in a black blanket, and hardly to be distinguished from an animal or a stone, "is one. I saw him shift his position so as to watch us; and I see three others in different directions, Meah; one will cough, or sneeze, or make some signal when we move—and there is old Rama in the doorway, listening. Guard, Meah! no, no; we may kill Tannajee if we are lucky, but were a guard to approach, he would be off into the deserted ground at the back, and who could find him? Now, come; and may the gods protect us!"

It was but a few steps. As they moved past, a

low cough proceeded from the sitting figure on the watch, and a light streamed from the doorway as the publican, Rama, moved in.

"Did you see that?" whispered Bulwunt—"is it not as I told you? Keep your sword ready, Meah; but be not hasty, whatever you may see or hear."

So saying, they stepped into the vestibule of the shop—an open space, around which were benches of raised earth or brick, neatly plastered over. A counter with some brass measures and a large copper vase, brightly polished, containing spirit, stood at one side, and a lamp burned in a niche.

Bulwunt took one of the brass drinking-cups and rattled it against another as a signal; for, as he supposed, the owner of the place had gone to an inside apartment. As he came forth, Bulwunt accosted him, and requested two hookas to be filled—one with tobacco, the other with ganjah, and was advancing to the inner apartment when the man stopped him.

"There are no hookas to be had here to-night; it is past the hour, Babajee," he said, "and I am out of ganjah till to-morrow. Nor can you go in there, for the place is engaged; and they who are within will not brook being disturbed."

"Ha! then there is play going on, Rama; and that is what we came for—a new hand is always welcome. Go and tell them there are two *gentlemen* without who would join."

"Play? No, truly," cried the man—"they have other work to do. But go your way, both of ye, for I cannot admit either of you at this time of night, and have no hookas for you to smoke. Begone; there are plenty of mudud khanas in the street besides mine, where you can get all you want. Begone, ere the rain increases."

"Nay, be not inhospitable, good fellow," returned Bulwunt, soothingly; "and here is a trifle for thee—even for shelter. Hark to the thunder!" And as he spoke, another blinding flash of lightning illumined the interior of the shop, while a crashing peal of thunder followed hard upon it. "We shall have more of that, Rama; and as to stirring out in the rain,"—for it had come plashing down with the thunder—"whose dog am I that I should go out in it—I or my brother either? Is this a night to turn two votaries of Sree Mahadeo into the streets—strangers, too, who know no other place of shelter? And were we not told to come to Rama's shop near the Temple?" he added to Fazil; who, sitting down, nodded assent, and followed his example.

"There is a Gosai's Mutt hard by, round the corner," returned the man doggedly, "and a temple of Bhowani away yonder, in the plain at the back, among the tamarind trees. You will find your brethren in one, and shelter and water in the other, if ye need them. Begone, and trouble me no more. Get up; why sit ye there unbidden? Get up!"

"Get up and go to a mutt, indeed!" retorted Bulwunt, who did not move, but, on the contrary, settled himself more determinedly and doggedly upon a seat. "Not I—in this rain! How, brother?" he added to Fazil, "shall we attempt to enter the mutt at night through barred doors?—be taken for thieves, and be fired upon for our pains, perhaps?" Fazil shook his head. "No: we were told to come here to Rama's —is thy name Rama, friend?—and here we are."

"Who told ye to come here?" asked the Kullal.

"It concerns thee not, good man," replied Bulwunt, "unless they call you Rama."

"That is my name; and what is your business with me?" he returned sulkily.

"That you will know by-and-by," replied Bulwunt. "Meanwhile, as to the mutt and the temple, who knows whether there is either the one or the other; and who can go to look in this storm? Wherefore, worthy sir," he continued to the keeper of the place, "we are very comfortable, and intend to remain. We are not beasts to be turned out in rain like this. So, kindly bring the hookas, and when we have smoked we will rest after our long travel to-day. As to those here before us, we are not likely to molest them; and if they do not let us alone, we have weapons, and can defend ourselves. Therefore, be reasonable." Bulwunt spoke loudly, that he might be heard by the men within.

"What noise is that?" suddenly asked a strange voice from behind a partition close to which they

were sitting. "Did I not tell thee, Rama, to admit no one?"

"May I be your sacrifice, Rao Sahib," returned the Kullal,* joining his hands together, and advancing to the door of the room, "your slave desired these two Gosais to depart civilly, but they will not move; they say they were told to come here, and ask for hookas. When I told them to be gone, one fellow talked about his weapons, and I believe they are drunk."

"About weapons, did he, Rama? and who art thou, mad youth, who venturest here into the privacy of gentlemen?" said a tall man, who now advanced from behind the partition with a sword in his left hand, while, observing that Bulwunt Rao and Fazil were armed, his right hand passed to his sword-hilt, and rested there, with a determined action.

How the stern tones of his voice thrilled to the heart of Bulwunt Rao, as he listened to them after an interval of many years. When he last heard them he was a mere youth. Shrieks of women were ringing in his ears, and his enemy's fierce commands to kill and spare none—hurried shouts, and the clash of steel. As he stood, the past recurred to Bulwunt Rao so vividly that, though years had intervened, it seemed only as if that night had gone, and morning had succeeded. There could be no doubt he was in Maloosray's presence. The same grave, determined manner—the same large black eye—as the proverb about him said, "Gentle as a fawn's, or fierce as a tiger's

* *Kullal*—publican.

—the same deep-toned voice. Time had hardly tinged his whiskers and mustaches with grey, but his face was weatherbeaten and seared, as it were, by the sun, and his large bony frame more developed, than when they had last met—the boy and the cruel fiery youth. The light from a rude lamp in a niche of the wall threw a strong glare upon his face, which he did not seek to evade; while the features of Bulwunt Rao and his companion were in a great measure concealed by the shadow thrown upon them in the corner where they sat.

"A poor Gosai," answered Bulwunt in the Mahratta tongue, but in a tone as haughty as that in which he had been addressed, "who, with his brother, has sought shelter here and refreshment. Why shouldst thou interfere?"

"Ha! a proud speech, young sir; and your companion, why does he not answer?" returned Maloosray.

"He has a vow of silence for a year, made at the shrine of our Mother of Tooljapoor," returned Bulwunt, doggedly.

"Enough," cried Maloosray, "begone in her name! There is a temple of hers a gunshot from hence; begone to it."

"We must know who it is that has the power to send us hence ere we stir foot to depart," retorted Bulwunt, rising, and raising his really fine figure to its full height; and as Fazil Khan followed his example, both were ready to meet any sudden assault. "Who dares, I say, send us out in such rain? Are

we men or dogs, to be put out with insult from a public place in such weather?"

Tannajee's sword was drawn in an instant, and flashed brightly in the flickering glare of the lamp. The others were as rapidly unsheathed; but both parties stood on the defensive,—neither struck.

"For the love of Mahadeo, for the love of Bhowani, by your fathers' heads! no blood-shedding here, good sirs!" cried the keeper of the house imploringly, passing between them, and stretching out his hands deprecatingly to each in turn. "I shall be ruined! fined!—they will hang me! Hold! there will be blood shed. Help! help!" he shrieked in a frantic manner, seeing Tannajee advance a step.

Hearing his cries and the altercation, two men rushed from the inner apartment with drawn weapons, and would have attacked the others at once, but Tannajee withheld them.

"Peace!" he cried; "put down your weapons, friends. Peace, bold youth!" he continued to Bulwunt Rao; "you have run a fearful risk unmoved, which you do not know of. Who are you?" he asked rapidly.

"A Gosai: I have said it already," replied the other.

"A disciple of what teacher?"

"How are you to know even if I tell it truly, who my Gooroo is?" returned Bulwunt. "Is Busunt Geer of Tooljapoor known to you?"

"Ha! Busunt Geer of Tooljapoor? but his chélah * is Poorun Geer, not thou?"

* Disciple.

"Maharaj, it is true; but I am the younger. Poorun Geer stays with the Gooroo."

"And your name?"

"As-Geer."

"When were you made a chélah?"

"About a year ago; and I was at Bhaga Nugger and Golconda till lately; in the house there."

"And what has brought you here?"

"I do not answer questions except upon the Gooroo's business," replied Bulwunt haughtily.

"Good, thou art discreet, O Babajee! And thy companion?"

"He is a novitiate under a vow of silence for a year."

"Good. Let there be peace between us for a while, till I prove thee true or false."

Bulwunt was about to make a passionate reply, when the imploring look of Fazil met his eye. It seemed to say, Go on with this deception; and, after a moment's thought, Bulwunt Rao determined to do so, and to refrain from violence so long as it suited his purpose. Ready himself to strike if needful, he might be able to throw Tannajee off his guard.

"Listen," continued Tannajee; "by one question I shall know if thou art true or false. If true, well for thee, Baba; if false, by the holy 'Mata!' hadst thou ten men's lives, and ten others to back thee, thou shouldst die like a dog."

"That is easier to say than to do," returned Bulwunt, in a contemptuous tone. "I have seen enough

of bullies at Bhaga Nugger to fear big words. But speak; if I can answer your question, well; if not, what is in my hand may reply to anything further."

Maloosray laughed aloud—a short bitter laugh, very grating to hear. "How much ganja hast thou smoked, O Baba?" he asked with a sneer; "but stay, this is folly. If thou art Poorun Geer's chélah, thou knowest Pahar Singh?"

"What Pahar Singh?—him of Itga?"

"The same; we call him of Allund."

"The Hazaree?"

"Ay—Hazaree, robber, Gosai, murderer, if thou wilt. If he is known to thee, why ask? By Khundoba! I distrust this fellow," he added to the two others, who closed up to him; "why did he ask?"

"I know him," said Bulwunt doggedly; "he is here."

"Where?"

"He was in the temple of Bhowani behind there, less than half an hour ago, for I spoke to him."

"Thou? why?"

"I had a message from the Gooroo for him."

"And where is he now?"

"Nay, how should I know? I saw him there with one Maun Singh, and another, whom I knew not."

"Strange that he should not have come," continued Maloosray, after a pause. "Art thou sure of the man?"

"As sure as that——" Bulwunt had nearly spoken his adversary's name, but a twitch from Fazil checked him. "As sure as that I see thee, O Maharaj."

"And who am I?"

"Nay, I know not, nor care. My message was to Pahar Singh, and it was delivered. I was told to come here to meet some others; ye may be they. Pahar Singh may be yet at the temple," observed Bulwunt, who trusted to his ingenuity to get rid of one of the men. "Why not send for him?"

"A good thought," said Maloosray; "go at once, Abajee," he observed to the smaller of the two men. "Here is my blanket—the rain will not signify, and take one of the men with you."

"And bring Pahar Singh here, Maharaj?" asked the man, sheathing his sword, and turning to look for his shoes, which were near a door they had not observed.

"Yes. Tell him I am here with Busunt Geer's chélah, and that there is no fear. If he be gone, come away; we will await you."

As Maloosray turned slightly to speak the last words, a look of intelligence passed between Fazil and Bulwunt; but though the odds against them had been withdrawn, Maloosray's suspicions had apparently not relaxed in the least, for he stood, his weapon ready for action, and his shield advanced before his body, so that Bulwunt had as yet no opportunity to strike as he desired. His account of

himself was plausible enough, but it did not apparently satisfy the wily Mahratta.

"And Pahar Singh was there, Baba?" he asked; "know you for certain? What message had you to him?"

"Nay, it was easy enough, Maharaj," returned Bulwunt; "all he told me was, to meet Pahar Singh at the temple of Bhowani, near the Kullal's quarter, this night, and afterwards to come to Rama's shop near the temple, where I should find some Mahrattas who would give me a message. I have reached Beejapoor in four days, and must return to-morrow. If you are the person I was to meet here, tell me what I am to say, and I will go; for we need a lodging for the night, and our horses are in the city."

"Where?" asked Maloosray.

"At the Taj Bowree;* but I shall be away by early dawn."

"But the fort gate will be shut, Baba."

"I have a friend at the wicket who will let us in. Do not fear for that Maharaj!" replied Bulwunt confidently.

Maloosray thought for a moment. "It must be true," he added. "Now, Baba, listen; if I trust thee, couldst thou help the cause Busunt Geer has at heart?"

"I will be faithful to him; is he not my Gooroo?"

* The Royal well, which is surrounded by cloisters and rooms, where travellers still put up.

"And thy companion?"

"Surely, as myself. We are one."

"Then listen," said Maloosray, for once thrown off his guard, and now leaning upon his sword. "I believe this tale could not have been invented, for no one knows, but the Gooroo, why Pahar Singh would venture to Beejapoor, and what need he had to bring me here? I do not care to see Pahar Singh, who is a stupid ruffian; but if thou wilt deliver my message to Busunt Geer in four days, it may save trouble to many people, and help what we have in hand. Tell him if he can get the Lalla's papers, to keep them; if Pahar Singh has them, to make him keep them till Khan Mahomed can redeem them. They will be worth thousands—lakhs, perhaps, if they are what I think. Tell the Gooroo that Sivaji Bhóslay will not be unmindful of his care in this matter; say also that Pahar Singh has disappointed me, and it is better the message went through thee; for who can trust one who has a double face, and who is with the King to-day, Sivaji the next, Alumgeer the day after — fickle and covetous, looking only after gold. Yet, if he please to meet me, he knows the place and the time. Hast thou comprehended all this?"

"Fully; but thy name? Thou may'st be an impostor. Whom shall I tell him I met at this place, and whose message am I to believe?"

"He did not tell thee? He was afraid, perhaps, my name should be heard in Beejapoor; but I laugh

at such precautions. Say that the servant of Sivaji Bhóslay—one Tannajee Maloosray—bids thee say what I have told thee——"

"Tannajee——"

"Ay! Tannajee Maloosray. If thou art from Poona thou mayst chance to have heard of it."

"Maloosray of Rohéla?"

"The same; there is no other Tannajee Maloosray living——"

"And I, villain and murderer! am Bulwunt Rao of Sewnee," he shouted, no longer able to control himself, and assaulting his hereditary enemy with all his force. "Upon them, Meah, in the name of the King! Hur, hur! Mahadeo!"

It was well for Maloosray that the point of Bulwunt's sword caught a projecting rafter of the low roof as it descended, else he had never spoken more. Nevertheless it reached him; and though a steel chain had been woven into his turban, which prevented a severe wound, the force of the blow somewhat stunned him; and so fierce and unexpected was the assault, that for an instant his habitual presence of mind failed him. But for an instant only. Ere Bulwunt could repeat the blow, Maloosray had leaped aside, and began to press his impetuous adversary very closely. Fazil, in his turn, had attacked the companion of Maloosray, and found him a wary swordsman; and the place, confined as it was, afforded no room for rapid movement; while the light was dim and treacherous. Blows were, however, rapidly ex-

changed. The quarrel could not continue long: for the shouts and cries of the keeper of the house, and of several of Maloosray's scouts, who were unarmed, aroused the guard, who rushed to the spot with loud exclamations and drawn weapons.

Tannajee felt in an instant that he had no chance if they entered, and he knew that if taken, his execution would be immediate and certain. Just, therefore, as the dark figure of the foremost of the guard was entering the shop behind Bulwunt, and by whose rapid tread and shouts he was somewhat thrown off his guard, Tannajee gathered himself up for a desperate blow, and delivered it with an abusive imprecation. "Once I failed," he said—"not now!" As he spoke, the heavy weapon descended with all his great strength; Bulwunt tried to stop it, but it caught the edge, not the face of the shield, and, though he partially succeeded or he had never breathed more, glancing from the hard and polished edge of the shield, it lighted upon Bulwunt's bare neck and shoulder, cutting down to the bone in a ghastly manner.

Maloosray saw with exultation that the blood poured forth in a torrent, and, as Bulwunt staggered and fell back, he called to his companion to follow him, and both darted through the back apartments into a court leading into a narrow street beyond, and as they passed they closed both the doors behind them.

"Follow me!—a thousand rupees for Tannajee Maloosray's head!" cried Fazil to the guard; and though they pursued him for a short distance, all chance of capturing him was hopeless in that murky darkness and heavy rain.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was no fear of Maloosray or lack of enterprise that caused the young Khan to desist from his pursuit; but finding that his retainer had not followed him, nor, indeed, any of the guard—the fear that Bulwunt might have been wounded occurred to him, or that he had been apprehended and detained. It was hopeless also to trace Maloosray, or to ascertain which way he and his companion had proceeded, as they issued from the door of the courtyard into the lane behind. Turning back then, after he had run a few paces, by the way he had come, and directed by the clamour inside the house, he passed rapidly through the yard, and entered the room where the quarrel had taken place; this he found filled with armed men, with several torch-bearers standing around what appeared to be the dead body of his friend.

Fazil had observed Maloosray's violent attack upon him, and that Bulwunt retreated a step or two to avoid it; while at the same time he had advanced towards his own antagonist. The consequences of

that blow, therefore, were not immediately seen by him. Now inexpressibly shocked and grieved by the result, Fazil heeded no one; but pressing his way through those assembled, somewhat roughly, he threw himself on his knees beside Bulwunt, who was quite insensible, and, laying aside his sword, strove to raise him up. He saw indeed with great grief that Bulwunt had received a very severe wound; and the pool of blood flowing from the cut, which had not been stanched, and his apparently lifeless condition, caused the most lively alarm.

"Will no one help me?" cried Fazil, looking round, while vainly endeavouring to stanch the blood which occasionally welled from the gaping wound, as Bulwunt breathed heavily. "For the love of God and the Apostle lend me thy waistband, good sir!" he continued, addressing a respectable-looking man who had accompanied the soldiers, and who was, in fact, the petty officer over them; "or bid some one loose my waist-cloth, else he will perish. Alas, my true friend and brother!"

"And who are you," returned the man contemptuously, "who, in the dress of a Kafir* Gosai, dares to take the name of the holy Apostle?—on whom be peace!—a thief or murderer, I warrant. How say you, brother? He may have done this himself, and now mingles with us to pretend grief and avoid sus-

* *Kafir*—Unbeliever, applied by Mahomedans to all who do not believe in Mahomed.

picion. Here is some evil, depend upon it; seize him and bind him fast."

"Yes, my lords," cried the keeper of the house, who now ventured forward, "bind him fast. That is the fellow who did the murder. They quarrelled over their ganja; and though I did all I could to prevent them——"

"Peace!" cried Fazil, accustomed only to command, and who could ill brook the measures threatened; for several men had closed about him at their officer's order, while another had kicked away his sword, which one of the men was picking up. "Peace, I say; raise him up! See, he is badly wounded; have you no compassion? He will die!"

"Whether he dies or whether he lives, one would think it was little concern of thine, boy," replied the man; "and there is blood on his sword, too," he added, as the man who had possessed himself of it held it up to the light. "Seize him, brother, and bind him fast; he will have to answer for this in the morning. Who art thou, ill-born?"

As the leader of the party spoke, several of the soldiers had thrown themselves upon Fazil, who still kneeled beside Bulwunt, and, holding him down, pulled the turban rudely from his head, and in an instant bound his arms with it so tightly behind his back that the act caused him immediate and exquisite pain.

"Who art thou, knave?" asked the man again peremptorily.

"Speak," cried several of the men, shaking him rudely; "don't you hear what his worship says to you? Speak!"

"It is useless for me now to say who I am," replied Fazil, looking round. "Enough that I am one of your own faith, as ye will know when the morning breaks;—one who may be able to punish you for rough uncivil usage, or reward you if that poor fellow is speedily aided. I care little what happens to myself; but if ye know of a physician near, or a skilful barber, I pray, good sir," he continued, addressing himself to the officer, "send for him, that a valuable life may be saved."

This speech was received with a shout of derision by most of the party; but their leader was not unobservant, and he saw at once, by the manner and speech of Fazil, that he was no common person; certainly not, what his attire proclaimed him to be, a Gosai. There was a chance that he might be some one of rank in disguise. The keeper of the house had declared him to be the man who had struck down the unfortunate Bulwunt; but, again, the consideration of his return to the spot, and his sincere grief at the poor fellow's wound, went far to assure the officer that his prisoner had not done the deed, and that whoever did it had escaped. These thoughts rapidly occurring, caused the Duffadar to doubt whether rigour were needful. "Art thou a Gosai?" he asked again. "Answer truly!"

"There is no God but God, and Mahomed is the

Prophet of God," exclaimed Fazil, repeating the creed, and, as rapidly as possible, in Arabic, the first part of the midnight prayer. "No, good sir, I am no Gosai, but a humble disciple of the Prophet, on whom be peace!"

"Toba, Toba!* now shame on me that I should have put a Moosulman to disgrace," exclaimed the Duffadar. "Loose him, friends—we will see to this; and run one of ye to the respectable Meer Hoosein, who lives in the alley yonder, and is a skilful doctor; and, if I mistake not, there is a clever barber, one Nunda, who lives near him, and who is accustomed to matters of this kind. Bid him bring his needles to sow up the wound. And, hark ye, no excuses from either about the rain and lateness of the night; this is the King's business, and a matter of life and death."

Then turning to Bulwunt, who had been raised up while Fazil's arms were being unbound, and who appeared sensible, he spoke cheerfully to him, bidding him not to be afraid, for he would be well treated.

"Water!" gasped the poor fellow, looking dreamily about him and pointing to his mouth—"Water!"

"Here is a vessel full," cried a bearded soldier, advancing; "drink, friend."

"Hold," said Fazil, "he is a Hindu; he will not take it from you. Where is the Kullal? Let him get some."

"Here, great sir," said the man, advancing with a

* *Toba*—Shame.

brass vessel full. "Who is he? May he take water from me?"

"He is a Mahratta," replied Fazil.

"Then there is no fear," added the Kullal, and he knelt down and poured a little into Bulwunt's mouth, who drank it eagerly, and, laying hold of the vessel itself, took a long draught, which seemed to revive him; while the Kullal, untying the scarf about his chin, wetted it with water and applied it to the wound; and, removing his turban, also wetted his head.

This treatment soon revived Bulwunt, who now sat up and passed his hand dreamily over his eyes, but did not speak.

"He seems recovering," said the Duffadar to Fazil, who had been pulled to one side and was held by two men, though his arms were untied. "So far thou art fortunate, young sir; but, in the name of the saints, why didst thou strike him down? Was this well? 'Twas but yesterday that the Kótwal swore on the Koran that he would have the right arm of the first brawler who should do murder: pity such fate should befall thee, young as thou art! Are there not enough of the Shah's enemies abroad to try thy weapons upon, without mixing in midnight brawls? But speak to thy friend, if friend he is. It may have been a hasty blow, deeply regretted."

"Sir, you are under some extraordinary mistake," said Fazil, who had several times tried to interrupt the speaker. "I am not the man who did this. Ho!

Bulwunt, Bulwunt!" he continued, "speak if you can, and fear not. I am here, and these are friends."

"Meah," said the poor fellow very faintly, "I am badly hurt. I may die, Ai Narayun! Ai Bhugwân! —Water, Meah! I am faint and sick,"—and he fell back almost insensible.

"Loose my arms, good sir," cried Fazil impatiently; "I am no thief to run away. If there be a Hindu among you, give him some water. I may not do so."

"Let him go," said the Duffadar to the men, "there is some mistake here, I think, and no enmity between them; and do thou, Jewun Singh, fetch a vessel of water—he will drink from thy hand freely."

Fazil's first act on being released was to examine the wound, which was severe, and required care. The sabre of Maloosray had cut deep into the neck, close to the shoulder, and the loss of blood had been very great. A little higher up and the wound must have been instantly fatal. To wring out the scarf which the Kullal had placed upon it, and replace it wetted, was Fazil's first care, and in this the Duffadar and some of the men now lent a willing hand. Fresh cool water was also brought by the man who had been sent for it, and Bulwunt Rao, having again drunk freely, sat up supported by his young lord.

"Ask him now, Duffadar Sahib," said Fazil, "whether it was I who wounded him, and, on his reply, give me liberty or not as seems good to you. Speak, Bulwunt Rao, did I hurt you?"

"Now may his tongue rot who says so," replied

the wounded man, looking wildly about him. "But thou art safe, Meah!—and did they escape?"

"Who?" asked the Duffadar sharply.

"Tannajee Maloosray, the friend of Sivaji Bhóslay," returned Bulwunt. "People know of him, perhaps!"

"Tannajee Maloosray? Thou art dreaming, friend," said the Duffadar with an incredulous smile. "Tannajee dared no more enter Beejapoor than—than——"

"Than you, good sir, dare go to him, I suppose," said Fazil, ending the sentence. "Nevertheless he was here, and but for a mischance would have been lying dead there."

"Tannajee here!" mused the Duffadar; "this must, then, be some deep plot, and the city is full of plots. Sir," he said to the young Khan, "the mention of that name, and all the events we have seen, cause many suspicions in my mind which I am not competent to dispose of; therefore, whoever thou art, release is impossible till the morning, when I must give an account of all matters to the Kótwal, who has cautioned the guards to be watchful against Mahratta parties and Mogul emissaries."

"Willingly," replied Fazil. "I could not leave him now, nor till his wound is dressed. As for myself, I am Fazil, the son of Afzool Khan, though I may not tell why I am disguised as an infidel, and why found in this place; suffice it to say it was in the King's service."

"Now may I receive my lord's pardon," cried the old man, presenting humbly the hilt of his sword as

an offering. "Why did he not tell me sooner, and this offence and presumption would have been spared? Who among us does not know the valiant Afzool Khan, and have not all heard of his son Fazil Khan, the pillar of the state?" he added to the men, who fell back saluting the young man with mingled curiosity and respect.

"Give me some water," said Fazil. "This dress and appearance are against me, Duffadar," he continued, laughing; "and if I had told who I was when ye seized me first, my arms might even have been bound a screw tighter perhaps. It does not signify now, for you only did your duty, as I can bear witness. Ah, the water is come—pour it over my hands, good fellow, and after the paint has disappeared, some of ye may know me."

"I know you, my lord," said a youth who pressed forward as Fazil turned again to the light from the door where he had been washing his face. "Yes, father," he continued to the Duffadar, "this is truly the brave young Khan—no doubt of that;" and he stepped forward and touched Fazil's feet.

"Too dangerous, too dangerous," said the Duffadar, "for one like him. Yes, thou art right, Ashruf—now I know the face too; but the disguise was perfect; who could have guessed it? Too dangerous: and thou the only son of the noble Khan! Ah, sir, had any evil befallen thee——"

"No matter if I had died," cried Fazil, "it would have been in the Shah's service; but here are the

physician and barber, and my friend's wound must be dressed; and do one of ye see for that Kullal, who knows more of Tannajee than any one else. Where is he?"

While some of the men went to search for the Kullal, the barber, having trimmed the lamp and increased the light by several wicks, unfastened a leathern case containing razors and other instruments, and selecting two crooked needles fitted with waxed silk thread, put them aside, while he washed the wound clean in a careful and confident manner. A few stitches brought the lips of the cut together, after which it was bound up with fresh leaves of the neem tree, which cooled the wound and refreshed the patient.

All this having been effected, Bulwunt Rao was carefully raised up and borne by several of the men to the chowree, or guard-room, which was hard by, but at the opposite side of the quarter to that in which the Lalla had been lodged.

CHAPTER XXV.

While search was being made for the Kullal, Fazil's thoughts reverted painfully to his father and sister. He could not leave Bulwunt without exposing himself to further suspicion; but he might at least send news of his safety, and his application to the Duffadar for a messenger was promptly acceded to.

"Surely, Khan," was the prompt reply, "I could hardly refuse your going yourself, if you asked; but it is better you stayed. Men's tongues are bad, and I am only a humble man. Verily I will send my own son Ashruf, and he will do the errand carefully. He is gone—that is, my son Ashruf—my lord, to see the barber home, and will be here directly. A brave youth, O Khan, and with a large heart. Does my lord remember the Friday's fight with the Moguls in the plain by Allapoor? Well, in that my boy did good service, and in killing one of the enemy got a sharp cut himself over the arm, but he did not care for it; and was he not fighting on the strength of the King's salt?"

"Indeed I remember it well, Duffadar," returned

Fazil, "for I was beaten down, and wellnigh killed myself, when this poor friend of mine here rescued me. How, Bulwunt! was it not that day?"

"Ay, Meah, that very day," he said faintly; "the last battle Bulwunt Rao will ever see in thy service. I am very faint, Meah. These films before my eyes seem to precede death. I pray thee leave me not here."

"Nay, fear not," replied Fazil; "the barber said there was no danger of life. Be of good heart, Bulwunt—no bones are cut; and though there is much weakness from loss of blood, you will soon be well. Get to sleep; we shall not leave before daylight."

"I do not fear, Meah. Death has no pain or regret for me. My only wish was to die in the service of your house. I am the last of my race, and have no one to mourn for me like thee, Meah! I would live for thee if it be the will of God; and but for this, death would be welcome."

"Peace! do not speak, friend," returned Fazil; "go to sleep, and thou wilt be strong ere morning. Does not the barber, I tell thee, say there is no danger? so be comforted."

"None perhaps of life, Meah; but this arm, which was all I had to live for, it will never hold sword more, Meah—never, never!" and he sobbed like a child.

"Fear not," cried the Duffadar cheerily; "I have worse wounds on me than that, Rao Sahib, and yet

my arm can strike a blow for the Shah; so be comforted, and get to sleep."

Bulwunt sighed. "If I had only slain him," he said, "and revenged the dead, then I could have died; or if this arm had gone for that, its best service in life would have been done, I shall never have such a chance again, Meah. But the gods have need of him, and he has the protection of Dévi. He and Sivaji Bhóslay both have it, as ye will see hereafter, Meah. Who can resist them?"

"This is the youth of whom I spake, Khan Sahib," said the Duffadar; "a brave boy—a brave boy he always was."

And truly there was much in the appearance of the youth to corroborate this. An open, dare-devil, good-humoured countenance, with bright merry eyes, which, as he spoke, seemed to close up till two bright sparks only were visible; and a wide bow-shaped mouth, about which fun, and perhaps some mischief, played in perpetual smiles, conveyed an impression of recklessness of danger, as a lithe rapidity of movement did of extreme activity of body, and perhaps endurance.

"A brave youth, doubtless, Duffadar Sahib," said Fazil; "his eye speaks for him; a boy to be proud of. How sayst thou, lad? Wilt thou do an errand for the son of Afzool Khan?"

"Ay will I," replied the boy promptly, while he presented his sword-hilt to the young Khan, as his father had done; "and gladly too; and if my lord

will pardon me for saying it, I have long known him. Who does not know the brave son of a brave father? Ah, Meah Sahib! if I had only been on a horse when Afzool Khan's paigah dashed into the Mogul's that Friday, I would have struck a blow with you. I watched you as you rode by close to the standard-bearer. Then there was a fierce fight, and men said you were cut down. Ah! I was only on foot, for we are too poor to ride; and I was——a little wounded," he added, dropping his eyes modestly, "and father led me away. But for that, Meah Sahib, I would have been with you, even on foot."

"Boldly spoken, and with a true heart, Ashruf!" exclaimed Fazil; "and if you do this errand carefully and quickly for me, you shall ride ever after with me in my troop—that is, if your father will permit it. Afzool Khan's stables have enough horses to find one for you. Of that, however, more hereafter. Go now to the house, ask for Goolab the nurse; tell her I am safe, but that Bulwunt Rao is wounded badly, and a palankeen must be sent for him with all speed, and my clothes and shawls put into it. If my father be asleep, he is not to be awakened, but my sister must know that I am safe. Now begone; here is my ring, which will pass you through the fort. Let us see how soon you will return."

"Come, Shékh Hoosein," said the lad, addressing a young man standing near; "we had better be two. Tie up thy waistband tight, for we shall not draw breath till we reach the city gate. Come!"

Both loosened their waistscarfs, and retied them tighter, and after a few words of caution from the Duffadar, they dashed down the street at full speed.

As they left, several of the men came in, leading the Kullal by the end of his turban, with which his arms were tightly tied down. Bareheaded, covered with mud, and bleeding slightly from his nose, his face wearing an expression of fright and pain combined, Rama was a very different-looking person to what he had appeared when Fazil Khan and Bulwunt entered his shop. His first impulse was to cast himself on the ground before Fazil, and lie at full length moaning. The men who were with him did not interfere. The act was a deprecation of anger which it would have been unmannerly to deny.

"Get up," cried Fazil; "get up, knave and liar! Say, was it I who wounded that poor fellow yonder?"

"Pardon! pardon! Noble Meah, pardon! Your slave will not rise till he has pardon," cried the man abjectly. "It was all a mistake; and how could I know the son of Afzool Khan? Pardon! and I will tell all I know."

"If thou dost not, hound! thou wilt hang upon the highest branch of the Goruk Imlee to feed the crows before morn," replied Fazil. "Get up! If thou tellest the truth, I give thee cowle;* if not—if I detect one word of lie, nothing can save thee. Dost thou hear? Rise!"

"Get up, Kafir!" cried the man who held the tur-

* Protection.

ban, giving it a jerk, which caused a corresponding exclamation of pain. "Don't you hear what my lord says to you? He will give you pardon if you speak the truth. Get up, and tell him all. My lord," he continued to Fazil, "he knows much, and he has some papers which one of the fellows—Maloosray, he says—dropped as he left the house. We wanted them, but he said you would pardon him if he gave them himself. We found him hiding in the wood-stack near his still, and the fool must needs struggle and try to wrestle with one of our men, and so got a fall; but he is not hurt."

"Loose my arms, noble Meah—tell them to loose my arms. They are swelling already, and I am sick with pain," said the Kullal, rising.

"If my lord allows me, I will loose him. There!" continued the soldier, on receiving Fazil's sign in the affirmative; "see thou speak the truth, else I will tie them tighter than ever, and they will not be loosened again while thou art alive."

"My lord, don't threaten me, or I shall lose my senses," said the Kullal, the horrible vision of hanging, as he had seen many hang to the branches of that famous tree, coming vividly to his mind. "If there be a good Hindu among you, give me a drink of water. Ah my arms! my arms!" he cried, sitting down again, and sobbing as the rope was loosened.

"Here is water," said one of the men, advancing with a brass vessel full. "I am a Rajpoot—drink."

The draught refreshed him, and he began his tale.

It was in the main correct, and as we have already related it. "Tannajee and his companions had been at his shop only a few minutes before Fazil and Bulwunt came in. They had been very careful, and before they entered the house placed scouts to watch all the approaches. They spoke in low tones, and, beyond a few words now and then, he had caught nothing of their conversation. All that he could gather was, that Pahar Singh and a Gosai from Tooljapoor were expected, and they were so impatient for their arrival, that two of the men had by turns gone to see after them."

"Had they ever been at your shop before?" asked Fazil.

"Yesterday one of the men was there twice to say the place would be wanted in the evening," replied the Kullal; "and he gave me ten rupees to say I had neither spirits nor ganja; so I told every one I had none, and no one stayed but you."

"You might have suspected they were after no good," said the Duffadar. "Why did you not give warning here?"

"Ah, sir, I am a poor fellow," returned the man, "with a large family; and if gentlemen sometimes like a private room to smoke, to play, or to talk in, am I to forbid them? Would they not get it elsewhere?"

"True enough—thou art not to blame," said Fazil; "but the papers—what of them?"

"After you were taken away, my lord," replied the

Kullal, "I took the lamp inside towards the door, for I thought I saw blood on the ground, which indeed there was; and one of the two men who escaped must have been wounded. I followed the trace of blood to the door of the yard, and there I found this little bag, noble sir; here it is."

As he spoke he produced a small silken bag, apparently filled with papers, from under his waistcloth, and handed it to Fazil. In it were several letters, and bundles of accounts written in the Mahratta character.

"I cannot read these, and they may be of importance; so we must wait, for this poor fellow of mine is asleep," said Fazil.

"No, Meah, I was dozing while you spoke, and am easier now, for the bandage has cooled my wound. Papers? What papers?" said Bulwunt, rising slightly, and supporting himself on his left arm. "Give them to me."

"There are some in Mahratta, which Tannajee, or one of his companions, dropped in their flight. Can you make out what they are, Bulwunt?" asked Fazil.

"I will try, Meah; put the light here. Stay; open them separately. I forget that I have but one arm now."

The papers were given to him one by one, and his eye glanced over several in succession as of no importance; but one appeared to interest him greatly, and Fazil observed his eye return to the commence-

ment after having looked over it hastily, and his lips to move as if reading it word by word, while the expression of his face changed to one of intense concern.

"Yes, Meah, this is indeed important," he said; "but no one must hear it but thyself or thy father. Listen," he continued, whispering; "that is from the old Gosai at Tooljapoor, about those letters the King has obtained. Those whom they concern are mentioned in feigned names, and it will puzzle me not a little to understand their meaning fully; but we have a clue in what occurred at the temple, and I will unravel it when we get home. Now my eyes are too weary. Stay, there may be something from Sivaji. . . . No," he continued, after he had looked at them one by one, "there are none from him, but several from Yessjee, who is his friend. No, they are too wary to write letters; but no doubt there is much intrigue afoot, Meah—much."

"Enough," replied Fazil; "now go to sleep, Bulwunt, till daylight brings people from the house. I too will rest, if I can, after all this excitement, with your permission, Duffadar Sahib——"

But the old man had lain down on the floor while the papers were being examined, and was fast asleep; so also were the men of the guard, except one sitting at the doorway as sentinel, the gurgle of whose hooka mingled with an occasional snore from a sleeper on the floor. Those about the Kullal, who had been removed to a little distance, asked how he was to be disposed of.

"Take him to his house," said Fazil, "and keep him there till he is wanted. Go with them, Rama," he continued to the man, "and be ready when I send for thee. I will answer to the Kótwal for the night's events."

"That is all I wanted," he replied. "My lord is very kind and merciful."

"Not yet. I have much to ask and much to hear. If thou canst speak the truth, well for thee; if not, beware!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

How slowly and wearily night passes when a sense of impending evil overpowers sleep, and renders every faculty sharply sensible to sounds and impressions otherwise of ordinary occurrence,—when a thousand vague phantasies flit before the imagination hardly more definite than the keenly-painful thoughts they awaken! How difficult thus to endure delay or uncertainty, and to account for causes of either, so as to gain consolation or assurance to one's self, far less to impart comfort to others whose fears and apprehensions are perhaps greater than our own!

Thus heavily was hour after hour counted by Afzool Khan and his fair daughter in the apartment we have already described. The Khan busied himself, or seemed to do so, with a pile of Persian papers, on some of which, from time to time, he made notes; but it was easy for his daughter to see that his eye often followed vacantly the lines of the writing, and that his thoughts wandered far from the subjects before him.

The Khan's wife, Lurlee, had come, and been dismissed with an injunction not to interrupt him, and that he should be late. Zyna did not disturb her father, and found a partial occupation in some embroidery, which helped to dispel for a time her fears for her brother; gradually, however, as the night wore on, it was easy for her to see that her father's anxiety increased. It was true that Fazil's return was not expected till after midnight; but that, under the thought of his perilous errand, brought no consolation with it, and she sat watching the expression of her father's countenance, yet not so as to be observed, and withdrawing her eyes when he looked up. A few careless words fell from time to time from both, and a few entreaties by the Khan to his daughter that she would take rest, were met by requests that she might be allowed to share his watch, for that she had promised her brother to await his return.

Thus midnight came, and with it sleep to the young girl, that would not be denied. She had folded her scarf about her person, and lay down where she was; and her father now watched his sleeping child, almost wondering at her beauty, as the light fell upon her, and projected a shadow from the long eyelashes upon her soft downy cheek. So with the image of the dead before him—for he remembered her mother even such an one as her child—Afzool Khan's thoughts wandered far back into the past,—far back to the time when, with life before

him and easy competence, the servant of a noble and united kingdom, the future had not concerned him, save only to wish that the happiness he possessed might endure.

But that bright future was long past. The present was dark, uncertain, menacing. Had there been any one to listen, the bitter sob of the old Khan—a sob of exquisite pain as his thoughts alternated between the happy past and a gloomy future—might have been heard,—such pain as those alone can know whose affections and memories of the past arise most vividly to augment any new suffering that may be present. The years of happiness in his home, which might have been his lot had his wife been spared to him, rose to the mind of Afzool Khan as a sad mockery; for though the grave had long held her whose fair form seemed renewed before him, it appeared almost as if she were again present to him in all her beauty.

"Thou art a fair blossom. May God love thee! May the holy saints keep thee! May thy mother watch thee, my child!" murmured the Khan, as he bent over his sleeping daughter. "Even such was thy mother in those first days, as guileless and as beautiful. Nay, thou art but the copy, Zyna. And had she but lived to see thee and thy brother as ye are, it would have been well. Yet why not well as it is?" he resumed after a pause; "surely Fate is good whatever it be. If my heart warns me of coming ill —nay, if he too be gone from me, well; he is

with her, and the old man will soon follow, and there will be peace, peace, peace! Yet I would live still a little for thee, my child—only for thee! else the first shot or keen sword-cut were welcome to Afzool Khan."

So he thought and watched, and at times gently fanned his child with the papers in his hand that her sleep might be the lighter, and again resumed his occupation of reading. All was silent, but the night wind sighed mournfully through the open trellis-work of the window, and seemed rising; and as he listened, there were mutterings of a coming storm.

Opening one of the small casements, he looked out. The city was dark beneath him, and still; even the dogs seemed to have gone to sleep. Far distant, the wailing howls of a pack of jackals came upon his ear fitfully, and again ceased as the sound was blown away by the wind. Over the face of the sky the wild dark clouds were now hurrying rapidly along, disclosing here and there a star, which was again as instantly hidden. In the west, the horizon was black and threatening, and the edges of a heavy bank of cloud, now fast rising pile over pile, were illumined like burnished silver, as lightning flashed rapidly through them, lighting up the city, and the bold domes and tall minarets of the mosques and mausoleums, with a sickly glare for an instant, to disappear as rapidly as a thought. One of the night-storms of the season was evidently approaching, and the cool fresh wind was grateful to the Khan, as he leaned

forth and looked into the void of darkness abstractedly.

The papers he had been perusing had been the subject of consultation that day at the court between the King, his Secretary, and himself. They were reports from the governors of the west and north-west provinces—a country which Afzool Khan had governed some years before, and knew perfectly—and related to a growing disaffection and a rising spirit among the people of the mountain valleys, which could not be accounted for save by the intrigues and machinations of Sivaji Bhóslay and his adherents. Sivaji, as a restless youth, had before risen in petty insurrection, and had resisted small forces sent against him, but had renewed his fidelity to the State, and had been pardoned. Notwithstanding, however, he was believed to be active in evil designs; and report assigned to him constant communication and intrigue with the Mogul emperor Aurungzeeb, as well as endeavours, on his own account, to excite the people.

Afzool Khan was no indifferent spectator of these events. He was one of those who, with others of his rank, had received profuse promises from the Emperor during his first invasion of the kingdom; and though Aurungzeeb's intentions had not been finally declared, yet Afzool Khan knew that if he favoured his cause, even secretly, for the present, he was certain hereafter, should the Emperor prevail, of high rank and rewards far beyond those which he now pos-

sessed, and also that the weight and influence of a few men like himself would at once turn the scale against Beejapoor, which already trembled in the balance.

The Mogul party, he well knew, was strong in the city. Many who had been disappointed of court influence almost openly professed it: they had nothing to lose and everything to hope for. But there were others—like the prime-minister, Khan Mahomed, for instance—who, in the enjoyment of large estates, high commands, and immense wealth, still desired more; nay, even the partition of the kingdom, that they might hold what they possessed as independent princes.

Again, Aurungzeeb's zeal for the cause of his faith was a well-known element of his character. He was a strict Soonnee,* who held the heretical belief of the Sheeahs† in hereditary hatred; and the sight of the noble domes of the mosques at Beejapoor filled him with a fervour of bigotry even stronger than the lust of territorial dominion, to subvert the royal house which held those detested tenets.

Afzool Khan was also an orthodox Soonnee. He looked with abomination upon the Sheeah ceremonies at the great mosque. He could not join in prayer there, nor could he enter save with the certainty of being offended and insulted by the religious ceremonies of his King. It was equally certain that the doctrines he professed belonged to a strong party in the city,

* Orthodox Mahomedans. † Heretical Mahomedans.

who on all possible occasions urged amalgamation of the country with the empire of Dehli, in order to insure the supremacy of their own creed. Yet he was true.

Like him, the minister Khan Mahomed had been faithful through many temptations; but of late, though he still preserved a fair and honest appearance with the young King, rumour had become busy with his name, and, intimate as was their friendship, the old Khan's trust in him was much shaken under an accumulated mass of suspicion, though, as yet, nothing definite had transpired. Hitherto also the minister's apparently unflinching adherence to what was feared to be a falling dynasty, and to a government which, under foreign invasion and internal disunion and distraction, had become weakened, had retained Afzool Khan's respect and affection; for this, combined with Khan Mahomed's professed devotion to the young King, who, with excellent dispositions and a fair promise of ability, was yet without experience, formed a strong bond of union between them.

Private friendship, and the free intercourse of camps and battle-fields, had existed for many years; and as their children grew up together, and the beauty of Zyna became notorious, the minister's son, whom we have already mentioned, pressed upon his father, very importunately, the necessity of formally asking her in marriage. But under his own secret hopes of the eventual ascendancy of the Moguls, and his convictions that the obstinate fidelity of

Afzool Khan would sooner or later lead to a serious breach between them, the minister had as yet refrained from taking any steps in the matter; and on his own part Afzool Khan had been equally guarded.

The events of the night, however, would disclose the real tendency of the Wuzeer's conduct; and the thought that there were grounds of more than ordinary suspicion, could not fail to increase the feeling that he was actually guilty, which for some time past had lain at Afzool Khan's heart. He had fancied, too, a growing coldness on the part of the Wuzeer towards him, unlike the spirit of their former free and unrestrained intercourse; and he could not fail to observe, in his visits to his court, that men to whom rumour attached the same suspicions as to the Wuzeer, were preferred as counsellors to himself.

All this, however, had as yet produced no personal disagreement: it was only mistrust, arising from suspicion on both sides; but the Wuzeer well knew that, if his designs were discovered for certain in any degree, he should find in Afzool Khan a powerful and bitter enemy, whose fiery temper and habit of prompt action, would make him a far more dangerous enemy than the young King himself. No one, also, knew better than the Wuzeer the temptations to which Afzool Khan had been exposed, and through which he had come as yet unsullied. He knew that in the Mogul army many ties of clanship and acquaintance existed for the Afghan, which the service

of Beejapoor did not afford, and that the Emperor, desiring to gain one so faithful, brave, and skilled in the field, who was also a Soonnee, had offered rank, titles, and estates, with his personal friendship and confidence, as yet in vain.

There had been times when Afzool Khan, wearied by petty slights, uncertain as to the future existence of Beejapoor as a kingdom, and comparing the wide field of honour in the imperial service with the narrow circle of Beejapoor, had felt tempted to accept these offers. But the thought had been as often repelled, and had led to a more steadfast and more healthy attachment to the young King; and when Ali Adil Shah, who had but recently succeeded his father Mahmood, displayed the possession of vigour and manly thought, and his disposition and talent appeared really equal to the maintenance of his dignity,—Afzool Khan's fidelity was no longer doubtful, and his openly-evinced confidence in his King had rallied the wavering attachment of many.

A more than ordinary proof of this had been that day given by the King in public Durbar. The Wuzeer was then absent from Beejapoor on service, watching the frontier, with a force to oppose Mogul incursions; and the King had, as an unusual act, invited Afzool Khan into his private chamber, to discuss the contents of the letters of which we have already seen the Khan in possession. They were many, and on many subjects; and the King's trust in the old noble could not have been more heartily evinced than

by permitting him to take them home for perusal alone.

They were a tangled skein of intrigue, alarm, and disaffection, of exaggerated rumour and detail of actual occurrences, which were not without signification in the aggregate. If, in reliance on the gradually increasing ability of the King, Afzool Khan had no longer hesitated, but, with the sincerity of an open and faithful heart, showed that he for one no longer doubted, and that his allegiance would be true—others as high in rank, and holding equal or greater territorial possessions, were not so; and, as we have already stated, there was much disaffection, not only in the the city, but in the army, and also in the provinces.

So long as the Moguls had beleagured Beejapoor, men of all parties, and, we may add, creeds also, had united in the common bond of self-preservation; well knowing the plunder and devastation which would ensue if the city were taken by storm or in the course of actual war. This also had been foreseen by the Emperor; and his advices from the traitors within, at the head of whom was the Wuzeer, led him to the conclusion that nothing was to be gained by open force at present. Enough that the seed of disaffection had been sown, which he trusted would, in a comparatively short period, bear the fruit he desired. On these considerations, Aurungzeeb had raised the siege, and lay at a distance in seeming inaction; nevertheless watching the course of events not only with eagerness, but with astute foresight

and untiring intrigue. Emissaries were busy in the city, and among the wavering and discontented gained many converts. Money, promises and assurances of protection were freely lavished, not only among the courtiers, but among the frontier chieftains, powerful tributaries, feudatories, and zemindars,* who possessed influence over the people, and wherever else it was possible. Village authorities were also canvassed; hereditary rights and immunities guaranteed, with confirmation of former grants from the Beejapoor princes.

All such were openly encouraged to revolt, to withhold payment of revenue, and to harass the government of the State by every means in their power. During the confusion attendant upon the Mogul invasion, many districts had been wrested from the State which could not be regained except at great cost and by the employment of separate forces, which weakened the general efficiency of the army. In some instances, those who had recovered and held such districts, had themselves retained possession of them, fortifying the village ghurrees or castles, occupying and repairing hill-forts, under pretence of assisting the King's cause, but in reality to strengthen their own positions. Of such, was the Mahratta prince, Sivaji Bhóslay.

The letters which Afzool Khan was perusing were of the tenor consequent upon such events. They

* *Zemindars*—landed proprietors and hereditary revenue-officers of districts.

were chiefly from governors of provinces, forwarding reports from their subordinates to make their own views more intelligible. Most applied for the assistance of fresh troops, permission to raise local levies, and funds to pay them; while they gave accounts of opposition and imperial intrigue, which were only too certain and progressive. Others detailed plots and rumours, or preparations for revolt which should be checked.

Around Beejapoor itself there was perhaps no apprehension; but everywhere at a distance the same confusion existed, and it seemed to Afzool Khan as though it were impossible to provide against the spread of growing disaffection which, if he had before only partially guessed, was here developed in all its hideous and most perplexing detail. Letter after letter was thus read and thrown aside, till, weary of the subject, and sick at heart with apprehension, unable also to determine upon any definite course of state policy, he had put aside the correspondence, and was reviewing the detail in his own mind as he looked out on the city from the window.

The question to be determined in particular was as regarded the condition of the country to the west and north-west, which heretofore had given no cause for alarm. When Afzool Khan himself had governed it, he found the people, if ruder in manner than those nearer the capital, yet peaceable and industrious farmers; and beyond checking local feuds, there was little need for exertion or apprehension of

any kind. Now the governor wrote of large assemblages of armed men, of habitual indifference to the authority of the officers of the State, and of the growing influence of Sivaji Bhóslay, before which he felt it next to impossible to maintain his own position or collect the revenue, much less to bring him to subjection.

The latest letters, too, described emissaries from the imperial camp having been traced in disguise to Sivaji's strongholds among the mountains, and an increasing belief among the people that he was destined to become a great prince for the subversion of all Mahomedans ; while it was very evident that, by some secret means, they were being organised either to revolt for Sivaji himself, or in the cause of the Emperor.

The writer was a personal friend of Afzool Khan's —one whom he had no reason to believe would write either from fear or from an incorrect view of existing circumstances ; and on this account his recent letters had not only become more important, but in a higher degree more interesting. He had forces at his disposal sufficient to repress any outbreak, but his knowledge of the people and the country, and the use they might be put to by the Emperor against the State at any critical moment, had confirmed apprehensions under which he had written, temperately but firmly, to the King, not to neglect or underrate those signs of the times ; and to seek among the counsellors and nobles at Beejapoor such advice in respect

to the prevention of local disaffection as might be practicable.

"If Fazil is right," murmured the Khan to himself, as he revolved these questions in his mind, "we may obtain confirmation of the designs of the Mahrattas and the Emperor, which will assist the comprehension of these letters. But it is strange that they have any common cause, or that such discordant elements should unite, even with the hope of mutual assistance."

A low cry from his daughter aroused him from his reverie. As he drew himself within the lattice, Zyna had raised herself, and was looking about scared and half awake. "Fazil!" she said. "O father, I dreamed I saw him lying before me looking as though he were dead, and then he seemed to change to you; and I was terrified and screamed out."

"Be calm, Zyna," he replied, supporting her tenderly; "thou hast been much excited, and needest rest, and no wonder that an evil dream came to thee. Fear not; he is safe, and I am beside thee."

"Safe, father? then he is returned, and I have been sleeping carelessly."

"No, daughter, he is not come yet. He has most likely taken refuge from the storm, which was severe."

"In my dream I heard the thunder, father, but it seemed as though it were cannon. I marvel that I slept through all."

"And soundly too, Zyna; but look, the morning

will be fair for their return," and he opened the casement.

The black pall of clouds which had hung over the city had passed away, and the wind had fallen, except a cool gentle breeze which blew freshly in at the window, and rustled among the foliage of the garden. Here and there the silence was broken by a gentle and distant murmur in the city, for, early as it was, some were already astir.

"I will watch now, father," said Zyna; "surely you have not slept at all. I am quite rested, and will wait for Fazil."

"It is near the third watch of the night, Zyna; thou art not afraid to be alone if I sleep? If Fazil come not before dawn, I will mount the Paigah, and we will soon bring him to thee; but I have no fear now, and say this only to content thee. I will try and rest my head for a while, daughter; for it is weary, and these papers have caused me much thought." So saying, he lay down on the divan where he had been sitting, covered his face with a shawl which Zyna gently cast over him, and at once fell into a deep slumber.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Zyna sat beside her father, trimming the lamp as it needed, wondering much at Fazil's strange absence, and occasionally taking up one of the papers with which her father had been occupied, and reading it vacantly. Zyna could read, which was unusual in girls of her age and class: and, originally of a studious character, she had learned enough Persian with her brother from their old teacher, a superannuated secretary, to be of use both to her father and brother; more especially to her father in his confidential correspondence. Apparently she found nothing to interest her very much, for she laid down letter after letter after reading the superscription, and looked out through the lattice impatiently, as it were, for the coming dawn. The bright morning star now appeared above the tops of the trees, and a glow overspread the whole east—the false dawn; which, while it as yet gave no definite form to the surrounding objects, yet relieved the extreme darkness of the night. As Zyna sat, she fancied she heard a sound of voices at the gate, but it died away. It

could not be her brother; he would have been admitted at once. Again, as she listened, and the silence seemed painful, the murmur was renewed, and she started up.

"It is he—Fazil is come!" she cried eagerly to her father, awaking him. "Oh, father, go to meet him; would I could go myself!"

Afzool Khan listened from the window, and Zyna could see that the expression of his face increased in gladness, and the revulsion in her own heart caused agitation which she could not restrain.

"He is not come," said her father; "it may be some messenger. God grant there may be no evil tidings! Be calm, my child; I will go below and ascertain, and will return or send word about him."

Hurrying down to the gate, he found the sentinel in altercation with the lad we have before mentioned. It was evident that the boy had been there some time, and the sentinel, being informed that his young lord was safe, had no idea of wakening any one before the usual hour of morning prayer. As Afzool Khan approached the gate alone, he heard the lad's earnest prayer for aid answered by a dogged refusal.

"Begone!" said the man through the wicket; "thy tale may be true enough, and the Sahib Zadah * may be where he is; but, look you, the great Khan Sahib is fast asleep, and cannot be awakened. Everybody is asleep: there is no woman here to send to him in the zenana. Begone therefore, or lie down at the

* The respectful title of a son—literally, "lord's son."

gate. When morning prayer is over, thou shalt have speech of the Khan. Till it is broad daylight, I draw no bolt. If thou wilt not go, at least sit quiet, for there are gentlemen in the guard-room here who might treat thee roughly if disturbed in their sleep."

The boy was turning away sadly, when the voice of Afzool Khan was heard calling from the inner court, as he unfastened the door leading to the larger one.

"Whose is that voice?—who speaks without?—why is he not admitted?" he asked.

"My lord," replied the man on duty, "the Sahib Zadah is not here, but there is a boy who says he knows of him."

"Was it well, Yousuf, to turn him away?" asked Afzool Khan. "Suppose my son had had need of us."

"Nay; but my lord slept, and the Sahib Zadah was safe. Bulwunt Rao only is wounded—and there were no women to send—and I did but tell him to wait," stammered the man.

"No matter—where is the boy? Open the wicket," said Afzool Khan impatiently.

"He does not consider who may be behind it," said the soldier, as he unfastened the ponderous iron bars and unlocked the padlock of the wickets, "and that this may be but a device to attack the gate. But he will always be headstrong."

"I am here, Khodawund,"* said the lad, from with-

* "My lord."

out, and squeezing himself through the opening between the wicket-door and the chain which fastened it. "Behold I am now before you, valiant sir," he said to the sentinel, "whom you took to be a thief; but I would have speech of the noble Afzool Khan himself, if it be possible to have him aroused."

"I am he," returned the old Khan, stepping forward. "Speak on, if what there is to be told may be said before these men;" for several had now arisen, saluted their master, and were standing by him.

The boy touched the old Khan's feet reverently. "Fear not, noble sir," he said hastily, "for the Sahib Zadah is safe. He met with no hurt, though he was in danger."

"Ul-humd-ul-illa!—Praise be to God," broke from the old man fervently, and was heartily re-echoed by all around; for men were arriving every moment from the different portions of the court, and crowding round to hear the news. "Ul-humd-ul-illa! O holy Geesoo Duraz!"* he continued, looking up, "I vow fatehas† to thy tomb, and a new covering shall it have of the costliest cloth-of-gold. But go on, boy, and fear not. Is there aught for my private ear?"

"Nothing, my lord—nothing. There was a fray, and Meah Sahib's attendant or friend was badly wounded. I want a palankeen for him; that is all."

* *Huzrut Syud Geesoo Duraz*—"Prince of the Long Locks"—the name of a celebrated Mahomedan saint, whose tomb at Gulburguh is esteemed the most holy, as the saint is the greatest favourite of all, perhaps, in the Dekhan.

† Thank-offerings.

"And my son—why did he not come with thee? And who art thou?" asked the Khan.

"They call me Ashruf, and I am the son of Peer Mahomed Duffadar, and Meah Sahib could not come, because," added the lad, dropping his head, "he was my father's prisoner—and——"

"By the Prophet, but this is too much!" exclaimed the fiery old Khan. "Who art thou, knave, that dares to say the son of Afzool-Khan is a prisoner to any one?"

"May I be your sacrifice, O Khan," returned the boy, nothing daunted, though the Khan's angry speech was re-echoed by all gathered around him. "May I be your sacrifice, there is no harm meant to your noble son, whom we all know and honour. He it was who, in my hearing declared, that in order to save my father, he would attend the Kótwal's court; for it was but yesterday that the Kótwal swore he would have the right hand of the first brawler taken, cut off, and hung up in the chowke,* and that he would degrade the first officer who failed to apprehend those concerned in any riot. Be not angry, therefore, noble sir, for my father explained all this, and your son goes of his own free will. My father could not help it, you know, my lord," added the boy apologetically, "for a man had been wounded, and there was blood on your son's sword."

"Ay! Jehándar Beg is likely to be a man of his word, too," said the Khan to those about him, "and

* Market-place.

force will do no good. But it were as well that my son should be attended, I think. What say you, gentlemen? So be ready some twenty of you, and call up the spearmen; the palankeen and bearers, too, for Bulwunt Rao. We could ill spare him, poor fellow, from among us."

"Nothing could have happened if Meah had taken some of us with him," cried several of the men at once. "We all wanted to go," added Rhiem Khan, "but he bade us mind our own business, and took Bulwunt Rao with him; and see what has come of ganja-smoking."

"And Meah might have been wounded or killed," added several.

"My friends, there was need to do it," answered Afzool Khan; "a secret service for the King cannot have too few witnesses. As to his life, or mine, or that of any of you, do we not eat the salt of the King, and should our lives be grudged? Peace, then, and hasten to get ready: the morn is fast breaking, and by daylight we should be in the saddle. Keep the boy, he must accompany us." So saying he turned back into the private court in order to seek his daughter, who had followed him. Goolab had been beforehand with her, and had communicated the news in her own way, with many marvellous additions, while the Khan was giving his orders to the men. Now, therefore, on hearing her father's brief confirmation of Fazil's safety, all past anxiety was at once forgotten, and, with glistening eyes and a thankful heart, she clung

to him as they entered the small court of the zenana apartments together.

By this time, too, Zyna's second mother, who as yet has been barely mentioned, had been aroused from her sleep by the prevailing bustle; and as she habitually indulged in long rests, and disliked early hours most particularly, she met the Khan and Zyna in a mood of very querulous character, which arose partly from having been robbed of a large portion of sleep, and partly from having heard Goolab's exaggerated report of Fazil's danger. Now, the good lady had not even known of his going out, nor, as her lord had requested not to be disturbed, of the manner in which the weary night had passed.

"Blessed be the holy saints that he is safe!" was the exclamation of Zyna, as she threw herself upon the lady's neck; "there will be no delay now, and my father will bring him to us. O mother, are you not thankful?"

"It was well done of thee, Khan," cried the lady ironically, disengaging herself from Zyna, and not heeding her words, "to send that poor boy out in such a night as the last has been. Such thunder and lightning! Naked, too, I hear—to run the chance of cold and wounds. Ugh! and thou sayest thou hast a father's love for him? Toba! toba!* I swear to thee, had he been my son, he should never stir out without my permission. I would take care of that. He should not go hence, Khan Sahib, until I knew

* For shame! for shame!

that the planets were propitious—a thing—Alla defend us!—that some people care as little about as—as . . . and then to think what a tempting of destiny it was to send the boy from home without asking or caring for the positions of the stars, or finding out whether there was not an adverse planet in a threatening house. As it is, we hear that Fazil is wounded—that is, he might have been; and that Bulwunt Rao has had his head cut off—that is, nearly, for he has a horrible cut in his neck, and his head is hanging all on one side; and," she continued, wiping her eyes with the end of her scarf, and in a whimpering tone, "all this comes of not asking me. What am I in the house but less than a dog! O Khan——"

"Peace, Lurlee!" returned Afzool Khan tartly. "What cross words are these so early in the morning? Enough for thee that the boy is safe, and that we have subject for thankfulness in his escape from danger, and not of sorrow. Peace! is it thus Alla should see thee after His mercy? Fazil will be here presently, and will tell thee perhaps as much as I know."

"Ay, perhaps!" retorted Lurlee. "I, who am less than a cat in the house, and as gentle as a sheep, am thus treated! O Khan! shame upon thee that I know everything only when it is stale, and comes to me through the bazar! Are not all your goings and comings hidden from me? and now I hear you and Zyna sat up all night together; and I was told you were not to be interrupted, and had to eat my dinner by myself, and to get to sleep as best I might. O

Khan! am I less than nobody? I who am of the family of——"

"Thou wouldst only have been anxious and fretful, Lurlee," returned the Khan soothingly. "The planets would have troubled thee. We meant only well in not telling thee. It was an urgent matter, and we could not wait for the astrologer to read the tables for us, or tell us what star was in the ascendant. Go, see after some breakfast, or whatever can be got for Fazil; we may be detained, and I'll warrant he is hungry enough already. We cannot wait for lucky hours sometimes, but must take what Alla sends us."

"I will not go, Khan. I will not be put off with empty words," she cried angrily; "and if you do not choose to read the stars, what does it signify? are not the consequences of your error on your own head? When was it that the stars were aught in your eyes? Have I not read you many a warning, which, had it been heeded, would have saved much trouble—much! When Fazil went forth to battle, did I not warn you not to let him depart? and did he not come home wounded and senseless? And when I told you one day, when one of the horses died, that something bad must befall us because of the evil aspects of the stars, I was only laughed at. Is this true or false? And yesterday, if I had but been asked beforehand, could I not have told all that was going to happen? Behold!" and the lady drew from her bodice a table regularly

constructed to aid her astrological predictions and researches—"behold! were not Saturn and the Moon in conjunction? Is not that bad enough? and cannot you see that is the reason why Bulwunt Rao, poor fellow, has had his head cut off?"

"Peace, Lurlee!" again cried the Khan, to whom his wife's astrological wisdom had long proved a serious annoyance. "If all the planets in the sky had come together for good or for evil, Fazil must have gone last night, for it was an errand of life or death. Now all is safely over, go and prepare some sheernee * for distribution, and be thankful for what is, rather than anxious about the stars——"

"Toba, Toba!" exclaimed the lady, interrupting him; "for shame, for shame! O Khan, to blaspheme the stars! May your sin be forgiven!"

"Nay, mother, but he did not blaspheme," urged the gentle voice of Zyna. "He did but mean that Fazil was safe everywhere; for thou knowest, dear mother, that he is in the hands of Alla, and that the blessed Alla is above all."

"He is not above the stars," retorted the lady angrily, and over-anxious to establish the truth of her favourite superstition—"that is, He—I mean—He is above them; but then——"

"Ah, Lurlee! better leave them alone," cried the Khan, laughing. "Art thou not sinking deep into the mire of thine own conceit, lady? Well, thou art

* Milk with sweet rice, offered at saints' shrines, and given to the priests as a thank-offering.

welcome to them if they will teach thee not to be wilful, and not to do thine own desire, which is ever ill controlled and variable; and as to their being higher than Him who made them,—why, I have no more to say."

"I said no such thing," retorted the lady doggedly; "but it is ever thus. Take care, Khan, of wilful disregard of warnings."

"Another time, perhaps, wife. Now we cannot delay, for the Kôtwal has got hold of Fazil, and that is worse than an adverse conjunction of planets. But fear not," he added, seeing that the countenance of Zyna betrayed alarm; "a word from me, and he will be released."

"If he is not, I will go to my cousin the Wuzeer's wife, and beg for him," replied Lurlee.

"Ay, in spite of the stars? Well, well, beebee,* I hope it will not be needed," said the Khan cheerily. "We are not yet come down to asking favours of our cousins' wives. No, Lurlee; keep thine interest for another time, and see to it that thy cousin doth not require thine aid ere thou hast to ask hers."

"Impossible, Khan!" cried the lady sharply. "Thou art pleased this morning to underrate my poor self and my relations. It is well, O Afzool Khan!" (she meant to be very impressive when she called him by name)—"it is well—I say it is very well, that you speak thus. See to it that thou, too, want no aid from them."

* Lady.

"I do not need them, Lurlee," replied the Khan. "As to their aid to me—nay, be not angry—I have not much hope of it; and for the rest, if I am right in what I think, there is evil impending over the Wuzeer's house, which all the stars will not tell thee of, nor him either. May the saints avert it! If it be true, thou shalt know of it ere many hours be past, and we will try to aid him; but at present let there be peace between us. By-and-by thou wilt say to Fazil, It was well done, though our news may not please thee. Go, girl, bring me my sword," he continued to Zyna. "Bring a shawl too, for the morning air is chilly."

Zyna was glad to escape, for, in truth, bickerings such as we have noted were too frequent in the house to be very tolerable, and sometimes one side, sometimes the other, was in fault;—most frequently, perhaps, the lady, who, having had no children of her own to care for, and having in her youth been instructed in Persian, had turned to divinity and astrology with great zeal. In the latter she had indeed great faith, and professed herself able, as no doubt she was willing, to direct all affairs of the house, as also of the state, by planetary influences. Thus, no event could happen without its being, to her perception, plainly written in the book of destiny, which the light of the planets rendered easy reading; and if a dish happened to break, or a cow or bullock died, or a horse had to be purchased or exchanged, or any household rejoicing made, or trouble endured, all were

found to have connection with the planets, or to be the consequences of the lucky or unlucky days and hours of which her life was composed.

Lurlee Khanum being a scholar, was also an object of envy to many of her female friends, and was consulted by them upon various turns of their fortunes; and in regard to lucky colours for dress, lucky moments for putting on new clothes, settling matches and marriage-days, the weaning of children, putting them into new beds, cutting their hair or nails, and the like domestic matters, she was an unquestionable authority. She, according to the rules laid down in her book, had written several charms, and given them to her friends, which, together with the virtues of certain herbs and medicines, had been the cause of relief to babies when cutting their teeth, and when they cried at night, or had bad dreams, or infantine ailments; and had been efficacious also in averting evil spirits, evil eyes, and the envious wishes of others.

For these accomplishments—especially her skill in astrology, which was believed to be very wonderful, indeed almost a special revelation—Lurlee Khanum was held in vast respect by all classes in her quarter of the city; and her opinions and interpretations of the stars were decidedly preferred to those of Meer Anwur Ali, the old Moolla of the public mosque nigh at hand; and a considerable feud existed between them in consequence. For the Moolla considered her as an interloper, and as one by no means instructed or qualified to have converse

with what she professed, whether astrology or medicine; and had been known to say, irreverently no doubt, that more people died of Lurlee Khanum's medicines than the angel of death knew what to do with. In short, Lurlee Khanum, the second wife of Afzool Khan, was a much more popular person than the first had been; who, being a foreigner, and absorbed in her husband and children, cared little about her neighbours; whereas her successor was in most respects the exact reverse.

Lurlee Beebee had once been handsome. She was of somewhat dark complexion, but had very large lustrous eyes, with a prominent nose, and had not escaped marks by smallpox, though they were not disfiguring. When the Khan married her, her figure was perfect; but she had lately, much to her mortification, increased in size; and though she took many infallible receipts to prevent fat, it would accumulate. For many years she had had hope of children, and had made vows to all the shrines in Beejapoor, had sent gifts to those at Allund, Gulburgah, and Gôgi, and had vowed to make vast distributions of money, and to do other charitable acts, if her prayers were granted. Now she began to fear she had no chance, which had vexed her not a little, and had combined, with other troubles, to give a sour, grim expression to her countenance, which rarely left it.

There were times, however, when she was bright and pleasant; for, really kind at heart, few had

greater powers of pleasing than Lurlee Khanum; but as her husband became more and more occupied with public affairs, estrangement had begun, and was progressing. There was one fear which had beset Lurlee for many years—that her lord, seeing she had no children, would marry again; and the idea of a sister-wife was very intolerable: this, however, had passed away. The Khan was advancing in years, his children were growing up, and she had no fear of another usurping what affection remained, or interfering with her household management.

To the Khan's children Lurlee was fondly attached; indeed, they were now the principal links between her lord and herself. Their mother had died when they were of tender age; and, after Lurlee's hopes of children ceased, she took more kindly to them than before, and had done her duty by them. Nor did their father interfere with that deference to her judgment in matters concerning them, of which she had better knowledge; but her increasing faith in her own infallibility had begun to distress both, as they could not help estimating at its proper value the superstition upon which the majority of her acts and opinions were founded once for all.

Such was Lurlee Khanum, the only lady in the harem of Afzool Khan. Other nobles of his rank would have married as often as the law allowed, without reproach; but the old Khan's affections had seemingly died with Zyna's mother; and the excite-

ment of war, of political events, and provincial government, together with the management of his fine estate of Afzoolpoor, had apparently filled his mind to the exclusion of other subjects.

In a few moments Zyna had returned, bearing the weapon, which her father took from her; and having entered the garden with her, they performed their ablutions in the mosque before mentioned, and went through the usual forms of the early prayer. The Khan then returned to the zenana, where Lurlee Khanum met him.

"I have put up some food in the palankeen," she said; "see that Fazil eats it. I would all this were safely over," she added after a pause. "Thou art not angry with me, Khan—with your Lurlee? do not go forth angry with me, my lord."

"No, no! not angry, dear one," returned the Khan, much moved and softened. "I am not angry, but impatient; forgive me, Lurlee. Alla keep you till I return: and you too, my child! Fear not; I will bring him safely to both of you."

The Khan's horse awaited him in the outer court, and with it a strong troop of his best horsemen, with a company of spearmen, whose combined force seemed enough to have rescued Fazil, had there been need. Afzool Khan was greeted heartily by all, and as he cast his eye over the group of steady and oft-tried retainers, he felt that confidence which results from habitual companionship with

others, and that no danger could reach Fazil which they could not share or overcome. The greeting was as heartily returned as given; and the gates being thrown open after a few questions to his son's messenger, and preceded by him and the band of spearmen who ran before his horse, Afzool Khan and his retainers pushed forward at a rapid pace.

It was now broad daylight, and the freshness of the morning, and its clear bright atmosphere, rendered every object more beautiful than it had been before the rain. Every stately mosque and minaret, palace and mausoleum, with their bright gilded spires, caught the fast-increasing light, and stood out boldly against the clear eastern sky; while the rich foliage of the trees, unmoved by any wind as yet, hung in heavy masses, and seemed refreshed by the moisture they still retained. As they passed the various gardens, the rich fragrance of tuberose, lime, and orange flowers loaded the air almost to excess; while the very ground gave forth that refreshing earthy scent which, in India, after rain, mingles so peculiarly and yet so gratefully with every other perfume. Few persons were yet abroad; and with the exception of an occasional devout Mahomedan proceeding to early morning prayer at the mosque—a young rake, with a small band of sword-and-bucklermen, returning from the night's questionable companionship—a few humble carriers of fruit and vegetables coming from villages without the walls to the morning market,

with here and there small companies of travellers starting on their daily journey,—all was silent and deserted; and the heavy tramp of the horsemen, as they proceeded at a rapid pace, sounded strange and suspicious at that unusual hour.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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